VINTAGE
A.C.

Route
SCALE IN MILES
0
100
200
John O'Groats
Inverness
Blair Athol
Stirling
Glasgow
Carlisle
Selby
Doncaster
Newark
Biggleswade
LONDON
North
Sea
Atlantic
Ocean
Amiens
PARIS
Montlhery
Orleans
Auxerre
Viérzon

Bergerac
Marmande
Mont de Marsan
San Sebastian
Vitoria
Pyrenees
Burgos
Aranda
Sierra de la Guadarrama
Madrid
Talavera
Badajoz
Merida
Almendralejo
Seville
Jerez
Gibraltar
PORTUGAL
SPAIN
Tangier
El Ksar El Kebir
Rabat
Meknes
Fez
Taza
Casablanca
MOROCCO
Ben Guerir
Marrakesh
Great Atlas
Tlemcen
Oudjda
Oran
Orleansville
Relizane
Blidah
Algiers
Boghari
Djelfa
Lagouat
Bou Saâda
Constantine
El Achir
Setif
La Calle
Guelma
Beja
Tunis
TUNISIA
ALGERIA
Mediterranean Sea
Avignon
Fréjus
Monaco
Genoa
Pisa
Florence
Chiusi
Rome
Naples
Pompeii
Salerno
Lagonegro
Cosenza
Messina
Palermo

NINE THOUSAND MILES IN EIGHT WEEKS

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Photo by Lenare

Mildred Bruce

Frontispiece

Nine Thousand Miles in Eight Weeks

Being an Account of an Epic Journey by Motor-Car through Eleven Countries and Two Continents

By

The Hon. Mrs. Victor A. Bruce

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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FOREWORD

It was largely through a casual word of mine that Mrs. Bruce undertook the tremendous task which she has recently brought to a highly successful conclusion, and so I welcome this opportunity of congratulating her upon the performance of a most remarkable feat. As she will no doubt explain in the pages of her book, this great drive was undertaken with a three-fold object. First, she wished to demonstrate that a British car is just as roadworthy in adverse conditions as those of Continental make; secondly, Mrs. Bruce wanted first-hand evidence as to motoring possibilities in some of the more out-of-the-way parts in which English motorists seldom venture. And thirdly, she desired to show that a woman's will is every bit as useful as a man's greater physical strength where great achievement and extraordinary endurance are concerned.

I think it will be granted that these purposes have been handsomely accomplished, and though Mrs. Bruce admits that towards the end of her lightning tour on two continents she felt the strain, I fancy she must regard the result as justifying her valiant effort. I hope so, anyway, as her satisfaction lessens my feeling of guilt at egging her on to an undertaking that might have had serious effects upon her health.

To my lasting regret, I was not able to accompany the A.C. car throughout the tour. But one or two incidents in the Monte Carlo Rally, and, later, on the run back from the South of France, stay very prominently in my memory. First, there was the skid which we experienced almost immediately upon starting out from John o' Groat's. I knew that Mrs. Bruce was a really fine driver, as she had brought us north from London, but the way in which she dealt with this skid was really masterly. The car wagged its tail like an exuberant puppy, but there was never a moment's doubt that it was completely under control. And I believe Mrs. Bruce enjoyed it, or at least enjoyed " putting the wind up " her passengers.

I saw the same spirit of mischief again when, after about sixty hours at the wheel, she was driving over those interminable hairpin corners of the Esterels. We had been talking hard and fast for hours as a safeguard against sleepiness, but her particular amusement lay in trying to frighten me with a minute description of the dangers on either side of us. As I couldn't see the alleged death-traps, and had complete confidence in her driving, it didn't come off! But she enjoyed it, all the same.

Another incident which I recall, though with shame, occurred as we were crossing the Yorkshire Moors. I hate to admit it, but all three passengers had gone to sleep. Awaking from a doze, I suddenly realized the forlornness of the little figure at the wheel, thrown up in silhouette as I lighted a cigarette. She had been driving hour after hour through fog and snow, with, for goodness knows how long, not a soul to speak to! It seemed a scurvy trick to play—three able-bodied men, all capable drivers, to let a woman drive hundreds of miles through a wretched night, and not even to be able to keep awake to cheer her up!

A further recollection—1,000 miles on Montlhèry track. I don't think it is possible to convey in words the frightful monotony of driving round that little course at fifty miles an hour for twenty hours. And yet Mrs. Bruce, who would be the last to claim patience as one of her virtues in ordinary affairs, accomplished her task without one solitary word of complaint, although she was "ready to drop" when each day's portion of the mileage was completed.

Nature's recuperative powers are wonderful. We had a little while to spare at Nice, almost at the end of the Rally, and used it to tidy up before reporting at Monte Carlo. But our poor little driver could hardly stand when she got out of the car. She was, seemingly, almost at breaking point. But very soon afterwards Mrs. Bruce was driving us over the last lap of the 1,600 miles' run, as fresh as a daisy, and it would have been impossible to believe, either from her manner or appearance, if one had not known, that she had been driving continuously for three days and three nights!

But with regard to the book: I have been privileged to read bits here and there in manuscript form; also, I was both surprised and pleased with the success Mrs. Bruce made of her first attempt at journalism when my Editor appointed her Special Correspondent of the *Daily Sketch*. Condensation of a "story" into a skeleton cable is no easy task for a novice, if the result is to retain any individuality. But our newly-fledged correspondent, without experience or instruction, got the vital facts home to us in a form that needed a minimum of "sub-editing." By filling in the obviously missing words—omitted for economy—we had stories of real human interest, phrased in a way that made their authorship unmistakable to anyone who knew Mrs. Bruce's style of expressing herself. That also I regard as something of an achievement—and all the evidence goes to

show that there is a real treat in store for those who set about the reading of " 9,000 Miles in Eight Weeks."

But I have been talking about the author long enough. Shall we now see what she has to say, and how she says it?

ROBERT W. BEARE,
Motoring Editor of the " Daily Sketch."

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CHAPTER ONE

In which we casually arrange to go on a tour of many thousands of miles in eleven different countries and two continents; and in which everyone tries to scare us into modifying our plans.

CHAPTER ONE

" I've been thinking ! " my husband announced one evening as we sat on either side of the fire most Darby and Joanishly after a tiring visit to the Motor Show. It's a dangerous way to open a conversation !

" No, not really ? " I couldn't resist the obvious reply. " But can you remember what it was all about ? "

" Yes, how about a trip in Africa a little later on ? "

" But there's the Monte Carlo Rally in January," I reminded him. " Could we get back in time; or do you mean after that ? "

" Immediately after—carry on from Monaco when the Rally's over."

" That would be lovely," I said. " Let's have a look at the map."

And that is how our more ambitious tour grew out of a comparatively modest beginning. The Rally is a fairly strenuous long distance reliability run; in our case the starting-point allotted was John o' Groat's, involving a trip of nearly 1,600 miles in addition to the initial journey northwards from London of another 800. Apart from the official side of the competition and the possibility of winning a prize worth having, we always look upon the Rally as an excellent excuse to get down into the sunshine of the Côte d'Azur, with the cheering feeling on the long run down the length of France that some sixty other car loads of motorists are concentrating,

from every part of Europe, upon arriving at Monte Carlo at about the same time as ourselves. Towards the end one has more and more company on the road in the way of other competitors, and it is fascinating to speculate upon what has chanced to those of one's rivals who are encountered or overtaken, and to estimate the chances of good final marking.

Since this event has been organized, my husband has entered a car each year, and last season he was successful in gaining the first prize, having driven from John o' Groat's to Monte Carlo in 70 hours through a blinding snowstorm which had been raging throughout England and France for more than a week. Inspired by this fine performance, I felt I would like to see what I could do, and so I entered our A.C. saloon for the Rally.

The whole affair was delightfully casual—but who wants a motor-car tour that is as stereotyped as a "personally conducted tour"? The principal attraction of motoring is that it confers almost absolute independence of time-tables, and leaves one completely free to go where and when one will. Anyway, we marked out in pencil on the map what we thought would be an interesting tour, avoiding as much as possible ocean crossings and their consequent expense and possibility of damage to the car. Various routes lured us, but as we did not wish to be away from home too long the one eventually decided upon was roughly circular, apart from the initial run from London up to John o' Groat's and back. Along the Riviera and down the length of Italy; through Sicily and across to Tunis; along the north coast of Africa through Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco; across the Straits to Gibraltar, and then up through Spain to Portugal, back into Spain, to France, and then home to England once again —that was the itinerary we selected, and the one, with

very few alterations from the original scheme, which we followed. When, in the early days of our tour, revolution broke out in Portugal, we had some doubts of the wisdom of including that country in our list, although we thought it likely the trouble would have been settled before we wanted to motor there. But of that, more in the proper place.

Mapping out an approximate schedule which should bring us home not more than eight weeks from the start brought to light the first difficulty. There were so many interesting places *en route* to visit—Pompeii, Rome, the African towns and the desert, and Madrid, to mention only a few—and a weekly " day off " from driving (Sunday, of course) was regarded as essential; and we found the satisfaction of these two conflicting requirements very difficult. Setting 100 miles per day as a reasonable distance which should allow of leisurely sight-seeing when necessary without imposing too great a strain on car and passengers to catch up to schedule, we went more exactly into distances and so on, and found that an absence of about three months was involved. This was out of the question; and as I refused to sacrifice a single inch of the route which we had planned out, we had to make up our minds to rather more strenuous motoring than we had anticipated. But we did not realize how much more strenuous it was likely to prove; and even the gloomy prognostications of our friends as to what would happen to a party who ventured into " savage " lands with only a smattering of French left us as determined as ever.

But some glimmering of what might be before us came to my husband and myself from the reception which our demand for road maps of Italy, Sicily, Africa, Spain and France met with at the Club. The clerk in the touring department greeted our request with what seemed to me quite unnecessary amazement; he did not

gather what the proposed route really was, I supposed at first. It wasn't that, though.

" Excuse me," he said, " but do you contemplate taking your car through Italy? "

" Yes; why not? " I replied. " And into Sicily too, and Africa! And heaps of other places! "

" Why not! " he repeated in astonishment. " Why, the roads are quite impracticable in Southern Italy, and as for Sicily they're absolutely dangerous! "

" Do you mean dangerous for the car? " I asked, beginning to feel a little worried, as I could see my lovely route getting changed out of all recognition from the one we had so delightedly planned.

" Most decidedly," he replied; " not only to the car, but to yourselves as well. Why, huge rocks are continually falling all over the roads from the mountain side, and if you escape these and your motor-car ever bears up over the impossible roads to arrive in Sicily, you will only have it smashed to pieces in being shipped to Africa! "

" And what about Spain? " I asked, determined to hear the worst all at once.

" Well, all I can say about Spain," he replied cheeringly, " is that if it is possible to find worse roads than those of Italy, Spain is the place to look for them."

By this time other officials had joined our gloomy friend, and we really did have considerable difficulty in convincing them that we were seriously contemplating the tour. At least an hour was spent in discussing pros and cons—though mostly the latter!—and it was a very doubtful " Good Luck! " that sped our departure from the touring department. Perhaps we were a wee bit depressed by our visit; but, on talking over all we had been told, my husband and I decided that it was much too bad to be true. " Nothing risked, nothing gained " was obviously the right spirit—and we went on with

our preparations. Having fought for and won our maps, the luggage question came up for settlement, and as we proposed to carry two other passengers in our sporting four-seater A.C. saloon, many anxious hours were spent in debating how we could possibly carry enough baggage for four people for eight weeks without hopelessly overloading the car. List after list was made containing the "absolute minimum," the successive minima becoming gradually less and less; and even on the very eve of departure we were still trying to find places for the various odds and ends that had got left out. As for clothes, I had to be content with two frocks, sufficient change of "undies," and one poor, lonesome little hat—this last being a great sacrifice for me! Most of my friends were astonished that I was proposing to go to Africa without tropical kit, but I thought this was scarcely necessary at that time of year, and in the latitude which we proposed visiting; and, anyway, as in many other matters, I decided to trust to luck.

We managed eventually to get our luggage into tabloid form—one suitcase per person. And now that it is all over, I can honestly say that we were all quite content, and managed extraordinarily well—certainly much better than do those who litter themselves with odds and ends that are often not brought into use at all. On many occasions we were thankful to have only the minimum number of packages each to attend to, because unpacking and repacking gets very irksome when it is abnormal to spend more than a single night in the same hotel—while you can't very well forget articles of luggage when there is only one of them to look after! Regarding the adequacy of the garments that can be carried in one small case, should you not have sufficient, there are very few places, even in North Africa, where any necessary wearing apparel cannot be purchased.

I have spoken of "trusting to luck" in regard to one or two matters already, but there was another important point, in connection with which our friends had been more than usually pessimistic, and in regard to which we again decided to "wait and see." This was the matter of fuel and oil supplies, as we had grave doubts regarding Africa. It would naturally strike anyone contemplating such a trip that there might be difficulty in obtaining petrol in the wilder parts of the African coast districts. As it turned out, however, there is practically not an Arab town, of reasonable size, even in the remotest parts of the desert to which we penetrated—and we went as far inland as a normal car can go—where one cannot raise a can of petrol if necessary. And it struck us as something of an anachronism in the atmosphere of the East to find modern petrol pumps quite a common feature of the landscape.

Another difficulty was the question of passengers, as it seemed a pity to take a four-seater car with only half its complement of passengers on such a journey, apart from the usefulness in any possible emergencies of additional people. The length of time which we should be away from home, of course, was the principal snag, but eventually we arranged with two friends—Mr. Robert W. Beare, Motoring Editor of the *Daily Sketch*, and Mr. A. W. Pitt—to accompany us from London to Monte Carlo, whence they would return by train. And then the bright idea struck us that we could ensure a third passenger over the whole of the remainder of the tour by entering it as an official Royal Automobile Club Foreign Trial, and carrying a Club observer with us from Monte Carlo onwards. This we did, and finally the fourth seat was filled at least for a part of the time by Mr. W. Harold Johnson, the Motoring Editor of *Country Life*, who volunteered to come with us as

far as Algiers. So that was that, Mr. Beare promising to join us again as soon after Mr. Johnson's departure as he could manage. As things turned out, however, we had to travel light from Algiers, as our expected fourth passenger could not get away to rejoin us until we had reached the south of France.

As we had decided to make this an officially-observed trial, we thought that it would be a good test for the car if we wound up at either Montlhèry or Brooklands with a 1,000 miles' high speed test. Eventually it was decided to hold the test at the former place, Brooklands being closed at about that time of the year. As we were to pass through Sicily, we also decided to add to our programme a few circuits of the famous Targa Florio race-course.

Having arranged what we could and left the rest to fate to decide, one thing only remained to be planned. Letters! How should we keep in touch with home affairs? I will confess now that I didn't know much about it, but it seemed to me in advance that it was much better to arrange with probable correspondents to write only to a few of the larger towns at which we should touch, than to try and pick up letters everywhere along the route. Future events proved me right—as usual, of course! One of our companions, however, did not agree that it was at all a good scheme to be out of touch with England for the longish periods that our plan entailed, and insisted upon calling at the *poste restante* at nearly every small town. But although we wasted a number of hours that totalled up almost to days in searching for very successfully hidden post offices all along the route, he got no more letters than we did—in fact, scarcely any were obtained except at the same large towns where our own mail was awaiting collection. How many letters were lost it is impossible to say, but I am quite convinced from this

experience that a very great deal of worry is avoided by giving a definite date of arrival—and adhering to it, of course—at a few big places than by giving your friends a complete itinerary and letting them take the risk of whether, and when, their letters will reach their destination. The reason is the extraordinary dilatoriness of postal deliveries to the smaller towns, and we have found on more than one occasion that small towns much nearer England get their letters as much as three weeks later than big towns farther away. And another point we noticed was that you cannot place much reliance upon what the post office at home tells you about the time it will take to get a letter to a given place in either Europe or Africa. They can only say the time it ought to take, which is a very different matter!

Well, at last we were practically ready to start, and in the inaction of waiting for the actual day of departure, the pessimistic prophecies of nearly everyone with whom we had come into contact in our preliminary arrangements came back to us; and perhaps a few doubts as to the wisdom of trusting blindly to our star, and as to the possibility of carrying out the whole programme, did assail us. But the edge was taken from any such forebodings by the certain knowledge that we could do the first part of the trip—a mere tour to the north of Scotland, followed by a glorious non-stop 1,600 miles' dash to the sunshine of the Riviera. After that, what was to be, would be. But we were firmly determined to complete the schedule we had fixed if it was humanly possible, for to have cut out any section just because the roads were abnormally bad would have defeated the whole object of the trip.

In regard to the latter, I do not think I have made our purpose altogether clear. To a certain extent, of course, pleasure was at the bottom of the scheme; a little mild globe-trotting, change of scene, and so forth;

and when one does so many thousands of miles a year as my husband and I manage to get through, a few weeks away in completely novel surroundings is very attractive. But beneath this, we are very proud indeed of our little English car, and I have had many an argument, especially with Continental motoring friends, as to whether the British car can stand up to the very much more arduous conditions of use across the Channel. That never has been our opinion, and for some time we had been looking for a chance to prove that our home products are every bit as sturdy, robust and reliable as French and Italian cars in similar usage. Well, this projected tour seemed to offer just the chance we wanted —which is the reason why I was more than usually— firm, shall we call it?—when any attempt was made to get us to change our route. Bad roads and miles of mountain passes were inevitable, no doubt; nevertheless, all the more meritorious would be the performance should we succeed in carrying it through.

CHAPTER TWO

In which we drive for seventy consecutive hours from the far north of Scotland to the far south of France, showing how the various obstacles encountered en route were overcome.

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

THE START

CHAPTER TWO

Noon, January 13th, 1927; we had really started. True, the first 800 miles to John o' Groat's was relatively a tame affair, and entirely without incident worthy of recording. But the clear, cold air, the bright sunshine and the magnificent stretches of the Great North Road seemed in league to give us a joyful send-off, and it was in the highest of spirits that we dashed off the first 300 miles to Carlisle before bedtime. The next night found us in Inverness, with a fifth temporary passenger—an official of the Royal Scottish Automobile Club, who would " start " us on the Monte Carlo Rally on the following Monday morning, January 17th—and soon after lunch on the third day we ran up to the door of the John o' Groat's Hotel. Then more waiting—why is it that the greater part of one's life seems to be spent in killing time until the hour to do something worth while arrives? On this occasion there was a day and a half to kill; but worst of all were those last few seconds so grudgingly counted out by the R.S.A.C. official. " Five—four—three—two—one——," and, at last, " *Go!* "

We were off, with just on 1,600 miles to go before a proper bedtime. Still, dawn was just breaking, so that didn't worry us much then. Although it had been freezing hard all night, a real Scotch mist was blowing in from the sea, and I not unnaturally supposed that a thaw had set in. But the very first

bend after leaving the hotel proved me wrong. The mist was freezing as it settled on the road, which was literally a sheet of ice. On the very first bend adventure awaited us in the form of a skid, as I had not been prepared for the slippery condition of the road. However, I got her straightened out, and, needless to say, was not caught napping again, although icy and snow-bound roads dogged us almost all the way to London. Looking back over the whole round journey, I do not think there was a more arduous section than this first day and night, for, added to the treacherous surface, the roads over the Grampians were almost entirely under reconstruction. This involved long detours over appalling by-roads and the crossing of the most haphazard bridges imaginable; and all this was aggravated by thick white mist.

Scotland was entirely under snow, many of the mountain roads being closed. We had no difficulty, however, in getting through on the Grampian road, apart from the need for unremitting care on the slippery surfaces; but some idea of the rigour of conditions in the higher places was suggested by the tameness of the deer, which often obstructed us on the highway, showing no more sign of wildness than domestic cattle. Apart from a cup of coffee in Inverness, we had decided not to stop for food until reaching Blair Atholl, as we were naturally anxious to have done with the mountains before daylight failed, if possible. It was dusk when we reached the southern foot of the Grampians, and high tea at the little inn was very acceptable. But time was precious and we were soon off, speeding towards London. Our first official control was at the headquarters of the Royal Scottish Automobile Club, Glasgow, where we sat down to dinner as the guests of the Club. But with the first spoonful of soup there arrived a telegram from the Automobile Association—

the promised weather report. Hastily my husband opened the envelope, and read:

"Thick fog fifty miles round Carlisle. Mist on Yorkshire moors. Heavy snow falling onwards London. Frozen roads very dangerous."

Interest in dinner fled. With one accord we rose from the table.

"Let's get on with it!" my husband said, getting into his overcoat, and out into the drizzle we trooped.

Here we said good-bye to our official starter, whose destination was Glasgow, and having been delayed for a few more moments by members of the Press who were anxiously waiting outside to take flashlight photos, we started off again. But we had not travelled far before we struck the expected fog, and for the next 100 miles we had to battle our way through, only to emerge later into a blizzard. This, happily, did not last long, which was lucky, as it was absolutely impossible to distinguish the outlines of the road. But it was with a sigh of relief that I reached Doncaster, the next control.

But over the latter part of this stage I had to fight another trouble as well—sleepiness. I had been driving for some sixteen hours or more, and it was getting on into the wee sma' hours; and as we approached Doncaster I did not altogether spurn the suggestion that I should hand over the wheel to my husband for the next stage. But on the other hand the Press, through some misunderstanding, had announced that I should be handling the car throughout the trial, which made me feel that I should at least make an attempt to do so. The original intention had been that we should take 200 mile spells of driving, but in spite of the difficulties of the road I had really enjoyed the run down through Scotland, and had had no desire to take a rest. A few moments on terra firma, and some dainty sandwiches and

hot drinks at Doncaster while the car was being officially checked in, put new life into me, and having come so far unaided I determined to carry on to London, even though I gave in then. So off we went again, arriving in town " with the milk."

In spite of all the obstacles we had encountered, we arrived on time at Leicester Square, the second control. Here there was a much bigger crowd than had been expected, and to avoid causing trouble with the police we had to hustle on before half the greetings were spoken, so the question of who should carry on at the wheel was overlooked by everyone but myself. So I lay low and said nuffin', to save argument, and we soon reached the fine new stretches of the Folkestone road. On the outskirts of London we overtook one of our fellow-competitors, who hailed from Doncaster, his official starting-place. He and his passenger certainly looked very cold in a two-seater sports Ratier car, and we all felt thankful that we had such a cosy saloon. We reached Folkestone first, having covered the distance in a surprisingly short time. There was only half an hour left before the boat sailed, which shows how little time there had been to spare since leaving John o' Groat's. All might have been lost if we had missed this boat, as the only other one that night would have taken us to Calais, and added enormously to our difficulties.

I had been looking forward to the prospect of a real rest during the Channel crossing, quite forgetting that the kindness of the water could not be taken for granted, so I made a dash for my cabin, *sans* passport, *sans billet, sans* everything, leaving my husband to attend to the formalities. And as a matter of fact it was fairly smooth, I believe; but I was much too concerned in being a good sailor to go off to sleep. Perhaps it was as well, for I can state quite definitely, in my own

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

"THE ROADS ALL THE WAY WERE ICE-BOUND"

case at least, that having overcome the difficulty of sleepiness at the wheel the first night, I was not further troubled during the two following nights. And if I had really gone off to sleep on the boat, I should probably have awakened in a peevish mood, and perhaps not have carried through so well. After a coffee at Boulogne while the few simple formalities were in progress, we tackled the next long stage to Paris. The roads all the way were ice-bound, so care in driving had still to be exercised. We observed a bad skidding mishap at one point, the car having overturned into the ditch, which served to emphasize the need for extreme caution. Finding on arrival in Paris that we had time to spare, my husband decided to tighten up the shock-absorbers in readiness for the expected bad roads ahead, thus giving me the opportunity of snatching a short rest. We had great difficulty in finding the right road out of Paris, and in dodging speeding taxis at every cross-road, for, as everyone knows, that city is very much alive in the dead of night.

The third dawn found us well on the way to Lyons, the next official control, which we reached in time to sit down to lunch. Omelette and ham looked tempting enough, but I think the passengers as well as the driver had gone past the possibility of a serious meal while so much of the journey remained to be done, and it was not long before we were sampling the fine, new concrete road out of Lyons which now replaces one of the worst stretches that we were fearing. Avignon, which always seems many kilometres away after one thinks that one is approaching it, and which at night always gives me an eerie feeling of having been translated to a ghost city of the past, was the next objective; and we had the customary difficulty in finding our way into, and, still worse, out of the town. It was something after ten o'clock on the third night of the trip

when we left Avignon astern; and as this was the last control before Monte Carlo, I felt much cheered by a remark from the back of the car which I overheard:

"Only 330 miles to Nice!"

"Hurrah!" I cried, enthusiastically, for what is a mere 330 when one has done nearly 1,300 already. But——

"You wait!" my husband said mournfully. "Esterel mountains to come—and it will be dark, too!"

Then I remembered previous occasions when I had been driven over that road in daylight, and pictured the frightful chasms which yawned at every unprotected hairpin—of which I think there must be literally thousands. I suppose it was that these memories, plus justifiable tiredness, made me a trifle nervy as the mountains were approached, but I began to imagine all sorts of obstructions on the road, and it was only by driving really fast and keeping my attention from wandering in that way that I was able to continue. And the steady hum of my brave little engine seemed to be beating a tune, or trying to get a message through to me. I made out the words to be:

"Go on, go on! I can do it if you can! Don't let me down."

My husband prosaically remarks that "she must have been firing on five—couldn't have a period like that otherwise!" But I don't care—the song of the little engine certainly made me carry on through the worst time of the long run—and I don't pretend to be technical, anyway.

At last we came to the Esterels, and, feeling better by this time, I kept myself amused by telling my companion on the front seat of the terrors of the road —all the smashes I knew of or could imagine, and the frightful danger of the slightest mistake on any one

of the hairpins. As he had not been over the road before, and could not see whether I was exaggerating or not, I think he bore up wonderfully well. But none of us was sorry eventually, after a seemingly endless journey over a frightful surface, and a continuous rocking from one side to the other as we rounded each successive hairpin, to see the lights of Cannes shining out below us. Arriving in the central square of Antibes, after the heavenly relief of a straightforward run over a smooth road, we inquired the way to Nice from a belated wayfarer.

"*Tout droit!*" he replied; or it might have been "*A la droite.*" We took it for the latter, and turned to the right—always to the right; which brought us back into the central square again. Asking another pedestrian, we got the same reply, and, thinking that somehow I must have missed a turning, the episode was repeated. Back in the square, I shouted to a third pedestrian—and realized that it had been the same man each time! But I shall not again make the mistake of confusing *tout droit* (which is as much as to say "All right, straight on") with *a la droite*, or "turn to the right."

Well, this part of the journey was practically done, for the fine smooth roads along the Riviera through Nice to Monte Carlo were soon covered, and we clocked in near the Casino dead on time—and not so "dead" ourselves as might have been expected—at ten o'clock on the Thursday morning, having been 70 hours and 20 minutes on the road from the far north of Scotland.

This, however, was not the end of the Monte Carlo Rally, for on the following day the programme contained an Alpine reliability trial up over the Col de Braus, through Sospel, over another pass and down through Mentone to Monte Carlo. At two points on the route and at the finishing point were official checks,

at which, to have any hope of a good place in the final marking one had to be on time to a split second. This regularity of running would not normally be very difficult to arrange when one is carefully piloted with the assistance of a stop watch; but on this occasion snow on the passes was supposed to be so bad, and the roads so dangerous that there was even some talk of abandoning the trial. Eventually, however, the officials asked my husband to take our car over the route and report to them on the feasibility of holding it. His report was that to keep to the original schedule would be highly dangerous, since to maintain the official average speed between the checks would mean going more or less "all out" up the passes in order to have time to take the dangerous descents steadily and safely. He advised that the average should be halved; but notwithstanding this report, the trial was held next day without alteration to the regulations.

And the going certainly was tricky. At one point, right on the summit of the Col de Braus, a lady—apparently one of the competitors—came running round a corner and waving frantically to me to stop. I couldn't, of course, on the icy road, but letting the car lose speed naturally without using the brakes, I hoped for the best. It seemed to take an awfully long time to slow down, and we rounded several corners without finding the frightful catastrophe which the lady's excitement seemed to indicate. And then we came upon it—five cars, I think it was, all over the road, a low parapet the only protection against a drop of some thousands of feet, and no "hole" to creep through. Although we had slowed down considerably by this time it was still quite impossible to stop; but at the very last moment a car was pushed aside just sufficiently for me to sneak through, and we arrived at the first check, as usual, "dead on time." But

A REST IN THE SUN AT MONTE CARLO

that's just the way things happen, though for a few moments the position didn't look at all pretty!

A timed climb of the Mont des Mules, a *Concours d'Elegance*, a banquet at the Hôtel de Paris (at which, as the winner of the *Coupe des Dames*, I was rather embarrassed to find myself in the position of honour at the right hand of the President of the International Sporting Club of Monaco), and the prize distribution in the great Palace square concluded the Monte Carlo Rally for that season; but I look forward with keen anticipation to competing in future events. And as a result of the very fair and sportsmanlike treatment which I—a foreigner—received, I would like to see a larger British entry another year. The idea of entering for public competitions does not appeal to many private motorists, who know only of the painfully formal and hide-bound events which we have at home. But, strict though the regulations of the Rally are, there is a different atmosphere altogether about this event, and for anyone who is thinking of going by car to the south of France in mid-January the idea of going officially in a very enjoyable competition is well worthy of consideration.

I do not imagine, however, that a great many motorists are quite so enthusiastic as my husband and myself, and the idea of "making a labour" of a pleasant journey (although that is not how we look upon it) by driving continuously for three days and three nights may seem somewhat fearsome. In this case, therefore, there is no need to go first to the north of Scotland and back, so that the journey from London to the Riviera is one of barely 1,000 miles, which, under ordinary touring conditions, would take four or five days. On the long open roads of France one can go safely and enjoyably at 50 miles an hour or so for many hours on end; and the seemingly long distances

to be covered between stages pass beneath one's wheels with surprising ease. Two hundred and fifty miles at home is a very long day's run; but in France, with an early start, it is not difficult to knock it back by tea time, with no more fatigue than the same number of hours' driving would cause at home. The roads, too, are much improved, and in process of still further improvement, so that sustained high speed causes no undue strain on the car. There are, of course, even on this most popular of all French *Routes Nationales,* stretches where for many miles the surface is simply abominable, but the gradually extending sections of grand new highway soon make one forget one's troubles, and enable the lost " average " to be picked up.

And, once having arrived on the Riviera, there are endless things to see and enjoyable runs to take. At the conclusion of the Rally we had four days left in which to prepare for the second part of our trial, but as our two friends had to leave us on Monday we utilized one of the days in revisiting some of the beauty-spots that lingered in our memory from previous years. The best of these, I always think, especially in view of the ease with which it can be reached from the coast towns, is the little hotel, called Vistaëro. Never was a more suitable name chosen. It is situated on the seaward face of the rock 1,000 feet above Monte Carlo, and almost directly over the town. The veranda, in the shape of a boat, projects out into the ether, and beneath the tables along the low parapet there is, instead of solid flooring—wire netting! Immediately under one's feet, therefore, lies the sparkling blue of the sea, with snowy spray dashing over the tiny distant rocks, and all around the glorious azure of the Riviera sky. But I must not get poetical, or I shall be tempted to throw down this pen and take to the

wheel once again. Anyway, the visitor to Monte Carlo who does not climb up to Vistaëro on the Grand Corniche will have missed one of the greatest treats imaginable. Peira Cava, the home of winter sports, is another place which simply must be seen. After the dusty roads down on sea-level, the intense purity of the atmosphere up among the snow-clad mountains makes a very welcome change, while there is every opportunity for those who indulge in ski-ing and so on to put in an enjoyable time. There is not the slightest need to be afraid of motoring over the Alpes Maritimes, because the roads are magnificently engineered, and the incline is not at any point really steep. At first, perhaps, the constant hairpin bends might prove a little nerve-wracking—though not to anyone who has already safely negotiated the Esterels on the way from Avignon to Nice. Taken steadily, there is neither danger nor even difficulty; and, as a matter of fact, large chars-à-bancs regularly make the ascent to Peira Cava, a distance of about 35 miles, in 2½ hours. This is about the time that a private car would take also, since there can be no question of hurrying; and, with several hours spent in watching the various sports in progress, we made a very enjoyable day's outing of it. I will not go more into detail on the things to be done, from the motoring point of view, on the Riviera, as this is supposed to be an account of our "9,000 miles in Eight Weeks," and I do not want to talk about trips which we did not actually accomplish on this occasion. But you can take it from me that if British motorists only knew the enjoyment there is to be obtained down in the south of France; if they knew how little trouble there is with customs formalities; and, above all, if they knew how excellently a good British car behaves on the Continent, we should see far more of them

parked up among the many vehicles which line every public space.

Well, having shown our departing friends our favourite spots, the remaining days were likely to be very full for both of us in looking the car over thoroughly in preparation for the long run ahead of it, and in making those final arrangements which we had not been able to see to at home.

The following afternoon, standing on the platform of Monte Carlo station with Mr. Beare, waiting for his train to come in, he asked me whether I intended to drive throughout the tour, as I had done on the Rally.

" I don't think so. Why? " I replied.

" Well, my paper, and the public generally, would be much more interested in the affair if you did," he explained. " But that doesn't matter much to you, I suppose."

" But it looks so selfish, doesn't it, especially as my husband is a well-known driver himself? "

" No, scarcely; and he didn't seem to mind being a passenger on the Monte Carlo Rally, did he? "

" I thought he was awfully good," I said. " He just let me keep on as long as I wanted to. But I felt rather guilty at hanging on to the wheel right through! "

" I don't think you need mind what people will say, or how Victor will feel," he said. " Any kudos you may get out of it will be ample compensation for him, while the public will only see a wonderful feat of endurance by a woman driver—a good thing for the motoring members of your sex, and for the English car as well, I should say."

I hadn't thought of that. But if I could show that the car was so easy to drive and light to handle that even I—no feminine Samson, I assure you!—could

bring it right through unaided, it would emphasize the excellence of the English car.

"Here's my train coming round the curve," Mr. Beare continued. "Now, I am bound to think about the 'public-interest' point of view, but I don't want to urge you to undertake the strain if you think it could possibly be harmful. But do turn it over in your mind. Good-bye—or rather au revoir!"

"Au revoir—try to come to Algiers, won't you?" I called as the train steamed out of the station.

I was left with a lot to think about; but after carefully thrashing the whole question out with my husband we came to the conclusion that no harm and some good might result from my endeavouring to drive all the way, but he made me promise to give in the very moment I felt that the task was too big.

As you know, I succeeded, though there were many times when the words were on the tip of my tongue: "Here, Victor, you carry on. I'm done!" and I think that the attitude of the Press in general, and not only the *Daily Sketch*, proved that we came to the right decision.

CHAPTER THREE

In which we begin the Great Adventure, learning what a bad road really is, and inspecting various historic Italian cities and the ruins thereof.

Photo by W. H. Johnson

"THE QUAINT, NARROW STREETS OF ALASSIO"

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CHAPTER THREE

We found the French, who are always enthusiastic over anything in the nature of a motor performance, most interested in the start of our further trial, and on the morning of January 28th we were greatly encouraged by the hearty send-off given us by the Sporting Club officials—which was all the more pleasing from being entirely unexpected. But we were really glad to be off, for although we had refused to talk, or even think, about the gloomy forebodings which everyone had expressed, anxiety as to whether we were, in our ignorance, really attempting too much was naturally lurking at the back of our minds. Leaving the Principality behind, we duly arrived at the Italian frontier, and, the formalities completed, we set off on the glorious coast road for Genoa, the first night's stopping-place. The formalities, by the way, included setting our watches back an hour, for this country indulges in " summer-time " throughout the year. But a great deal of the " glory " was lost to me, owing to my attention being concentrated on driving. We had not penetrated far into Italy before it began to get more and more obvious that we had said farewell to good roads. And after passing successively through Bordighera, San Remo, Porto Maurizio and through the quaint, narrow streets of Alassio, a constant series of hills rendered admiration of the admittedly wonderful scenery an impossibility so far as I was concerned. Near Spotorno the road was wonderfully engineered, though

very dangerous, since the old highway has partially fallen into the sea, and there is no warning that the new road, passing in places through tunnels in the rock, must be taken. A steam train accompanies the road throughout this district, though after Savona the line is electrified.

In the light of after events, I suppose the roads so far were not really very bad, but we soon noticed the peculiarity that although the surface was not apparently much out of repair, the Italians seemed to take a fiendish delight in throwing down loads of loose stones, presumably in the hope that the traffic would act as its own steam roller. We found, as the tour progressed, that this is a special feature of Italian road maintenance methods—a feature which I do not admire. And I ought to add that we did actually see some steam rollers in Italy—of English make, most of them. In the course of our run down the " leg " of Italy we traversed literally hundreds of miles of these loose stones. In the meantime, the bad sections were comparatively short; but an additional trouble was the unending succession of level crossings—some thirty-six in all—as the electric railway and the coast road lovingly intertwined. As a result of these various obstacles, the run of a mere 117 miles took us all day, and fatigued us all more than twice or three times the distance would have done in France. When nearing Genoa we struck some of the most appalling roads in all Italy—and that is saying a great deal! —but this again we found to be typical of the country, since around all large towns it appears that one must expect shocking surfaces.

That first day in the country was educational in a variety of ways, for on the outskirts of Genoa we first came upon evidence of what in English eyes is frightful cruelty to animals, and, unfortunately, it was by no means the last. One rarely sees a properly fed horse in

Photo by W. H. Johnson

"WE TRAVERSED LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF MILES OF THESE LOOSE STONES"

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Photo by W. H. Johnson

THE LEANING TOWER OF PISA

Italy, and where at home a load is easily pulled by one decently cared-for animal, there the same load is painfully dragged by as many as four poor, starved scarecrows. On one occasion I saw a horse made to continue at work with a broken fetlock. And if a horse falls by the way and is considered to be dying, it is simply abandoned to its fate. So far as I can understand, there is some law in Italy whereby an animal may not be put out of its misery without the written consent of the owner, and not even the police may interfere. And as the horse in its normal working condition in Italy is not very far on the right side of the border, it may be imagined that we saw some very terrible sights. This tended to cast a gloom over our little party, but I don't want to do the same in these pages, so I will let the subject go at that.

Conditions of road in getting out of Genoa were even worse than those on entering, and for ten miles or more we could seldom exceed a speed of three miles an hour, and longed for a stretch of sound road free from enormous pot-holes, even though covered with the inevitable loose stones.

At Rapallo we were amazed to see houses and buildings—in fact a great part of the town—built upon rock and rising straight out of the sea. The coast road continues more or less all the way to Pisa, and is very beautiful as to scenery, though most trying from the driving point of view—as may be imagined when I repeat that the 117 miles took us all day until nine o'clock at night to cover. A good bit of mountain-climbing is included in the comparatively short run, with the passes of Bracco (2,014 feet) and La Foce Spezia as the *chefs d'œuvre* of the day. This was, therefore, another day of real hard work—amply compensated for, however, as we passed through the city gates of Pisa by the sudden sight in the moonlight of the famous Leaning Tower,

which I had always longed to see. Unlike so many far-famed attractions which are disappointing when at long last one actually beholds them, the Tower quite came up to my expectations, possibly owing to the more or less romantic conditions of my first view of it. But we were too tired to linger, and made post haste for our hotel, which, I was sorry to find, was magnificently decked out with marble floors, walls and ceilings, and absolutely cheerless. Very desirable as the coolness of marble may be in Italy in summer, a good English coal fire and less hygienic carpeted floors would have been more to our liking on this cold winter night. But I am bound to confess that the marbles of Pisa (other than my bedroom floor!) are wonderful, and I did not get away without spending some money on souvenirs. Two very fine pieces tempted me beyond the possibility of resistance; I arranged to have them shipped home, and I am glad to say they have arrived safely.

Italy continued to look after my education, that night in Pisa furnishing me with my first experience of an earth tremor—not bad enough, according to the natives, to be dignified as a real earthquake, but sufficiently fearsome to a novice to make one anxious to know whether the Leaning Tower had succumbed at last to its age-old fatigue. However, it had courteously awaited my arrival with a camera in the morning; and so far as I know it is leaning still.

The next day being Sunday, and so officially an off-day, we compromised by running only to Florence, in spite of the fact that it was pouring with rain, in order that we might spend the afternoon sightseeing in that picturesque city. I do not want to seem to labour the terrible state of the roads, but that particular forty miles was a nightmare, with huge holes and miles of stones just thrown down anyhow all over the road. To make matters worse, it was flat and uninteresting, except

for the touch of colour lent by the orange harvest, which is much earlier there than on the French Riviera.

Again, of course, the journey took us much longer to accomplish than the distance would lead one to anticipate, and there was not a lot of time left to "do" Florence. I was much impressed, however, by the numerous very fine buildings in that historic city which were certainly among the most magnificent I saw in all Italy; but the famous cathedral, absolutely different in architecture from anything I had seen before, was disappointingly bare inside, in spite of its gorgeous exterior. The two bridges that can be seen up-stream as one crosses the River Arno reminded me of what London Bridge must have looked like in olden days, as habitations are actually built on the bridges themselves.

For the first time we were not able to secure a lock-up at the garage. In an official trial such as ours, the observer must never leave the car unless it is safely behind locked doors, of which he holds the key. As it was unlikely that we should always be able to satisfy this condition, and so that the observer should not have to sleep in the car when a lock-up couldn't be obtained, we had had a bag of balloon fabric made which completely enveloped our saloon. This the observer had the means of sealing. "Bagging" the car was a troublesome business, but it had to be.

When this formality had been completed, we had a quick lunch at our hotel, and in the few remaining hours of the afternoon drove round in a voiture to see as much of the town as possible. I created some amazement among the natives by weighing myself on the public scales in the main square, finding, to my dismay, that I had lost half a stone in weight since leaving London. In the evening the rain, which had been falling off and on all day, set in for good, and while our companions braved the weather in order to see

Florence by night, my husband and myself had a quiet little dinner all alone in the spacious dining-room of the hotel, which was beautifully warm and comfortable after the chilly place at Pisa.

The next stage took us to Rome, and, having the prospect of a run of 218 miles to get through in the day over goodness only knew what sort of roads, we started very early. As luck would have it, conditions improved considerably, and although the surface would not bear comparison with that of an English main road, it was at last possible for me to look about a little. This also was lucky, because there was much of interest, in the way of wonderful ruins, and splendid oxen harnessed to the country carts, to see. The former so excited one of my passengers that I had the greatest of difficulty in keeping him in the car. He wanted to " snap " every one of them, which wasn't very promising for our chance of getting through to Rome that night.

I am afraid I was not very sympathetic. My job, I felt, was mainly to get the car home intact, and up to the present the only " ruin " in which I had been able to take an interest was the one which the frightful roads had threatened to make of it.

" I'll show you some ruins in a minute ! " I said.

" Where ? " he asked, eagerly.

" Here ! " I replied, bouncing the car through a pot-hole and nearly sending the passengers' heads through the roof of the saloon. There was peace in the rear thereafter.

Peace at the wheel, however, was short-lived, for after Montevarchi began a succession of short, steep climbs, increasing in severity as the day advanced, and culminating in the ascent of the Somma Pass, at an altitude of 2,194 feet. Passing through Arezzo, we ran by the shores of Lake Trasimina to Chiusi, where we stopped

Photo by W. H. Johnson

MOSAIC FRONT OF ORVIETO CATHEDRAL

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for lunch. Although the afternoon was waning when we reached Orvieto, we simply had to pause to admire —and, of course, photograph—the wonderful many-coloured mosaic of the cathedral in that city, and it was quite dark before we arrived at Viterbo. Here the massive walls were even more impressive by night than we imagined they would be by day, and there was some question of staying until the morning so that we could see the queer, walled town under all conditions. But the hotel accommodation was so poor that, although we were all tired and Rome was still far away, we decided to push on. We saw the lights of Rome from quite fifteen miles away, among them a great, illuminated cross high up on what was, I suppose, some religious institution. The last few miles were depressing—uninteresting, of progressively worse surface, and accomplished in a fine rain. But, tired as we were, we felt that arrival at Rome a day ahead of schedule was well worth the extra fatigue due to compressing two days' work into one, as we thereby gained a day to devote to exploration. It would have been a great disappointment to have had to push on and take Rome "as read"—which must have happened otherwise, since we dared not get a day behind on account of the arrangements made for shipping the motor-car across to Africa from Palermo. So we did not take the depressing conditions of arrival much to heart, though I do recall remarking:

"I thought the Romans made decent roads!"

One soon loses patience with the neglect that always seems to surround prosperous and poverty-stricken towns alike in Italy.

It may seem astonishing, but on arriving at our hotel, we were told that there were only two garages in the whole of Rome! I can't quite believe it even now, but there must have been some truth in the statement, as the hotel porter piloted us to what was supposed to be the

better of the two, and this was more than a mile away, outside the city gates.

Rome! Should I not devote a chapter to our day of sight-seeing? We "did" it very thoroughly, on the American principle; but my conscience will not let me enter into competition with the recognized guide-books! Besides, this is the story of a motor tour. At the same time, if one is earnest, it is amazing what a lot one can crowd into a very brief time. I managed to see the Coliseum, in the process of renovation so extensive that I am afraid it will be robbed of all romance, the Forum, Temple of Vestus, and most of the famous buildings. In the Forum I sacrilegiously perched myself upon the exact spot where Shakespeare makes Brutus declaim:

"Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me thine ears," etc.

And my husband added to the iniquity by taking some "snaps"!

They say that one may stay in Rome for seven years without learning all that there is to know, or seeing all that there is to see of the Eternal City; so perhaps in a few diligent hours I managed to learn as much about it as one would in a more leisurely month or so.

And, anyway, I haven't contracted to write a guide-book!

Leaving Rome with Naples as the next objective, we had the usual bad roads at the outset, improving later. But it was not until we were within twenty miles of our destination that we got our first taste of what a really bad road can be in Italy, and I recalled with something akin to fear the words of the Club official in London:

"*You are not going to drive a car through Southern Italy?*"

Photo by W. H. Johnson

OPEN-AIR LAUNDRY IN SOUTHERN ITALY

Photo by W. H. Johnson

THE COLOSSEUM, ROME

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It really began to look as though we should not be able to. The intention, on leaving Rome, had been to reach Naples at sunset, because the Naples of the picture postcards is usually shown as a city of luminous splendour. But, although the views were very fine, I am afraid that the sunset was completely forgotten as we tackled that last score of miles in the failing light. I had never imagined anything so bad, and if I had had the faintest conception of what was in store, I certainly should never have attempted to reach the city after dark. But there we were, and there was nothing for it but to continue. To make matters worse, all the working people were returning home with their horses and carts. They were all over the road, and made not the slightest attempt to get out of the way of the car. Progress, therefore, was simply a matter of dodging from one side of the road to the other, threading past huge holes, across sharp tram-lines, and over—when one couldn't go round—piles of refuse. They say "See Naples and die," and we all began to think that there was never a truer word spoken. I might mention, by the way, that not one of the vehicles had a light of any sort, so that the task of driving became more and more complicated as the evening drew on. We found this trouble and complete neglect of the rule of the road characteristic throughout Southern Italy.

In the meantime, however, we had had a little bet on amongst ourselves as to who should be the first to catch a glimpse of Vesuvius. It is supposed to be visible from some fifteen miles north of Naples. At last I saw it—or thought I did.

"Vesuvius!" I cried. "I've won the bet!"

"Vesuvius be blowed!" my husband retorted unfeelingly. "Don't you know a foundry when you see one?"

This damped my ardour for a little while, but I got my own back later on, as, while they were all busy map-reading, I espied the real thing above the sky-line. The smoke had a strange appearance, going straight up for a long distance and then flattening out against a cloud.

It was nearly nine o'clock when at last we reached the centre of the town after twenty of the most dangerous miles I ever hope to travel. And what a town! Of all the poverty-stricken, dirty and squalid places, Naples must surely hold the record. As to the smell, I will only say that on entering the town, everyone made a simultaneous dive for the window-winders to shut the Naples atmosphere out as much as possible. What with the narrow, congested streets, in which it was necessary to keep the horn going almost con tinuously, and the other things I have mentioned, scarcely think even the really magnificent view from the veranda of the Hôtel Bertolini makes the misery of driving through the town worth while.

This hotel, however, is worthy of a word to itself. At the top of a narrow, winding hill, one comes to the lower entrance of the hotel, where a lift conveys one up the 250 feet to the actual building. The view is the finest of any hotel in the town, and at night, with the thousands of lights twinkling in the bay, is even more fascinating than by day. I can imagine that the sight when Vesuvius is really lively must be wonderful indeed. Unless you stay at the Bertolini you will never see Naples as I saw it, while the advantage of height, since the perfumes of Naples appear to be heavier than air, is with you!

In the morning we spent several hours on the veranda, inspecting the wonderful stretch of country laid out at one's feet, and taking photographs, and it was eleven o'clock before we pushed out of the town on

Photo by W. H. Johnson

MAIN AND ONLY ROAD TO THE SOUTH FROM NAPLES

Photo by W. H. Johnson

TYPICAL ROAD ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF NAPLES

To face p. 55

the way to Pompeii. And although I should have said it was impossible for a road to be worse than that which had led us to Naples the previous night, and yet be usable at all, the main road from Naples to Pompeii actually was worse.

When we had nearly cleared the outskirts of the town, I suddenly remembered a most unusual oversight.

"Letters!" I shouted to the rear passengers. "You haven't been to the post office, have you?"

They had not, so, as Naples was one of the towns on our schedule there was nothing for it but to turn round and retraverse those horrible bumps. But it was worth it, for among other communications awaiting me I received the following wire from Mr. Beare:

> "*Editor appoints you Special Correspondent 'Daily Sketch.' Send news of tour, but keep eyes open for events of general interest also. Wire acceptance.*"

Delightedly I showed the telegram to my husband. "I'm a full-blown newspaper man," I said. "You'll have to say 'Sir' when you speak to me!"

But I didn't treat the new honour facetiously at all afterwards, and although the task of keeping the office fully acquainted, by wire and letter, of the progress of events and my observations of conditions as I found them often involved hard work late at night or early in the morning, it never became irksome. Indeed, I had cause to thank my additional duties very heartily when, towards the end, the monotony of driving long distances day after day began to tell, and only the necessity for keeping on the *qui vive* journalistically prevented my spirits from flagging.

The manager heard; and from his look I anticipated either pistols for two and coffee for one, or a stiletto-thrust in the dark. However, the storm did not break, and a little later we walked through a lovely little bit of garden laid out in English fashion, and passed the turnstile into the atmosphere of a long past age.

With vagrant recollections of Lytton's " Last Days of Pompeii " in my mind, it was not difficult to fancy myself back in the days of 2,000 years ago, in spite of a suggestion, conveyed by the turnstile, that one was visiting the Zoo. We passed through the old archway and up the steps into a street of large cobblestones, where I was interested to see the ingenious way in which the roads were kept sweet and clean with running water while yet pedestrians were enabled to cross dry-footed. Stepping-stones in pairs were used for this purpose, the passage through the middle being just wide enough to permit the horses to go through, while the wheels of the chariots drawn by them passed between the stones and the footpath. In the Forum, at the top of a slope, we saw the wonderfully preserved statues of the gods of olden days; and I managed to secure a souvenir in the shape of a piece of the original wall, which dates back to 500 B.C.

But it is no use for me to attempt a detailed description, since we had only two hours to spend at Pompeii; and there was a lot, moreover, which I was not permitted to see. But if we had not been anxious to get to Salerno, I expect we should have arranged to drive our little car up to the crater of Vesuvius, since there is some sort of a road. This would have meant a lost day, however, which could not be afforded on account of shipping arrangements, as I have explained before, and regretfully we pushed on.

As it turned out there was no need for excessive

haste, as the roads were much better over this short run than the approach to Pompeii from the Naples side had led us to expect. The coast town of Salerno proved to be a nice, straightforward place of beautifully wide streets, and we welcomed the contrast to our experiences of the night before.

CHAPTER FOUR

In which food supplies run short and tempers shorter, and even the Fates conspire to prevent us from entering Sicily; but showing how we got there all the same.

CHAPTER FOUR

STARTING from Salerno at seven o'clock next morning, since we had been warned that our proposed stopping-place, Lagonegro, was quite impossible, and we had, therefore, to make the 176 miles to Cosenza, we had one of the most tiring and disappointing runs of our tour. Not only was the road bad, but it passed through the most mountainous country of the trip, and we arrived at Lagonegro, where we hoped to obtain something in the nature of lunch, even though we might not stay there for the night, jaded and tired. But there is no room for optimism in Italy; it is safer to be uniformly pessimistic, in the sure knowledge that the actuality will exceed in unpleasantness your worst expectations! That, anyway, was the spirit of the party when at last we had climbed up to the sinisterly-named town, to find that not only was it impossible to get anything fit to eat, but that there was not a single place in the town where it seemed safe to take even a cup of coffee. I am afraid my temper suffered. I was not patient with the member of the party whose vice was an inordinate desire to seek for letters in the least likely places. However, there was no stopping him, short of going on and leaving him behind, and as he happened to be our official R.A.C. observer, I couldn't very well do that! But I did rather gloat when his painful Italian merely elicited confirmation of what my instinct had already divined—that Lagonegro did not possess the "modern con-

venience " of *poste restante* facilities, the mail being carried up from the nearest large town by mule pack.

There appeared to be no work done in this town. All the inhabitants were lounging about in the sun. Quite contented they seemed; though no doubt this accounts for the poverty and neglect that is rife in Southern Italy, as we noticed this happy idleness wherever we went.

Such an arduous tour as this certainly tends to bring out the qualities—bad as well as good !—of the members of the party. We all developed vices. I have mentioned that of one of us—letters ! Another had a perpetual passion for coffee and photographs; when he didn't want one, it was with demands for the other that he succeeded in irritating me. My husband, long-suffering as usual, bore the brunt of my jaded nerves in very sporting and understanding fashion, so I will let him down lightly; but I don't mind admitting that my vice was BATHS ! Like the others, unfortunately, I was seldom able to indulge it; but the prospect of luxuriating in lovely warm water at the end of the day carried me through the longest and most trying of the daily runs down through Italy. I was seldom lucky, but kept on hoping to the end, and no doubt my constant harping on the subject was a source of irritation to those others whose sordid minds could not rise above letters, coffee and photos !

Do I show myself up as an impatient little wretch whose irritability was brought on through her own " cussedness " in insisting upon driving the car without assistance ? Well, never mind; let's be honest ! I had, at any rate, determined to carry on to the bitter end if it were humanly possible, and I think each succeeding set-back only fixed this intention more firmly.

Anyway, I was only too conscious of the hard work

I had been through in getting to Lagonegro, and I remember exclaiming:

"Oh, do forget about your letters and tummies! Think of the journey before us—we've nearly another hundred miles to do over still more mountainous roads, and at night too!"

That shut them up, and emptily we stole away. There were thousands of hairpin bends on the roads we traversed that afternoon and evening. My husband was busily occupied during this part of the trip in map-reading, at which he is expert—luckily, for if it had not been for his skill I do not know where we should have landed. Ten o'clock was striking when eventually we arrived in Cosenza. Never did I long for that hot bath so much as on this night, and never was there less chance of getting it!

Piloted by a small and grimy urchin through a labyrinth of narrow streets crowded with Italians of all classes, we at last reached the good *albergo* for which we inquired.

This was situated near the summit of the hill overlooking this strange old town, and a more extraordinary place I have never been in. Passing through the front door, we entered that which, for lack of better description, I must call the lounge. We were greeted by the dirtiest of old men—whether proprietor or potman I never discovered. And then we noticed that in the lounge were stabled an ancient "growler" and a motor-car of about the same vintage! Facetiously we asked if we might park our own car there also. The old man did not seem at all surprised, but apologized for the lack of space, and said that there was an excellent garage next door but one.

We all looked at each other—an unspoken question in every eye.

"What about it?"

It was certainly not very promising, but beggars can't be choosers. We had to have a night's rest somewhere, and we wanted it right there. So we all got into the car again and drove, under the old man's guidance, into the "garage," a word which I quote advisedly. In the poor light I could not see much of the pit, of which I was warned to be careful—which was fortunate, as if I had seen it I doubt if I could have driven over it. On getting down, I found that this pit was so wide that the car was almost falling in, with the tyres on either side projecting over the lips of the chasm. Where ignorance is bliss . . . but we pushed the car out in the morning! And for this very doubtful accommodation we were charged a sum which, in English currency, was equivalent to five shillings.

Returning to the *albergo*, the old man led us down a dark, narrow, winding, stone passage, which brought us on to a landing with a number of rooms opening out of it. Striking a match, he pushed open a creaking door, revealing a weird and cheerless bedroom. The floor was of uncarpeted, rough paving stones, and an old, broken-down wash-stand was propped against the wall. Lighting a candle, he beckoned us on and showed us two more so-called bedrooms, which were to accommodate our R.A.C. observer and friend Johnson. As it was apparent that this was the best that could be provided, we prevailed upon the old man—who was, apparently, cook and waiter, as well as reception clerk, etc.—to prepare some food. This proved to be beef and fried potatoes, and much to our surprise the meal turned out to be not half so bad as we had expected. The others enjoyed this belated meal very much, but, having had nothing at all to eat, and only a cup of tea in the morning, since dinner the night before, the first mouthful I took gave me violent pains, and I had to rush off to bed. And I was divided between amusement and gratitude,

on putting my feet down the bed, to find that the old man, in his anxiety to humour the " mad English," had given me a hot-water bottle, which, on examination, proved to have been originally intended to contain whisky! But the room, and even the bed itself, were the weirdest things! The latter was actually of tin, painted to resemble wood. In the middle of the night I was awakened by a queer noise which I couldn't place at all until a further movement of my own produced the characteristic popping rattle that a tin tray makes if you manipulate it the right way. Just fancy—a tin mattress! But I slept jolly well, all the same.

Again the next morning we made an early start, as we wanted to catch the last ferry boat of the day from Villa San Giovanni to Messina. The scenery was very lovely in this mountainous district, and in the neighbourhood of Castrovillari we suddenly found that on either hand was a distant view of the sea—the Gulf of Toranto, in the Ionian Sea, on the left, and the Tyrrhenian Sea on the right. A somewhat prosaic feature of the very romantic landscape throughout was the telegraph wire, with its enormous spans sagging heavily as it jumped ravines and valleys in its " crow's flight " course.

After constant climbing for more than half the distance, soon after passing Tiriolo we suddenly heard, immediately ahead of us, an ominous rumbling sound, and turning a corner came upon a rock which had evidently just fallen from the mountain side. It was nearly as high as the car and a good yard in diameter, and left us only just room to squeeze by. It is no use speculating on what might have been; or on the enormous number of things which might have brought us to that spot just the necessary three or four seconds earlier. But for the next few miles we were very much on tenter-hooks (whatever they may be!) for fear of a

further fall of rock. Loose stones and bits of rock were scattered all over the road, so our fears were not altogether groundless, and the warnings on this score of the Club officials in London returned to my mind. There was nothing to do but carry on, of course, as to go back would merely have taken us through the same dangers, but we all gave a very heartfelt sigh of relief when this part of the mountains was behind us.

We were not allowed to go far without excitement, however. At a fork in the road, we found the left " prong " barred, so that the obvious thing was to take the other, especially as " Danger—No Passage " was very much in evidence on a notice board. But taking the right hand road went very much against my husband's ideas, and after a little while he remarked that, according to his maps, this road led back to the north.

" There's only one road into Sicily," he said, " and it must be the other one."

" Well, what am I to do? " I asked.

" Nothing for it but to reverse back and see if you can get through," he replied.

I did; and found the car would just pass between the large rocks which had been put down deliberately to bar the mouth of the road. But all the way along more rocks had been laid in the middle of the road as a warning and hindrance, and I began to wonder what fresh danger we were running into. Blasting operations seemed the most likely, and I was expecting every moment to be carried skyward, car and all. But it was not quite so bad as this, and round a last corner we found the real cause of the obstructions—a broken bridge over a wide river. The structure had collapsed in a dozen different places, and presented a serpentine appearance; and, on getting out of the car to inspect, we found that there was an actual break of quite two yards

Photo by W. H. Evans

"LOOSE STONES AND BITS OF ROCK WERE SCATTERED ALL OVER THE ROAD"

across. It looked as if this was going to terminate the journey, and I could almost have cried with disappointment.

But never say die! Calling together a few labourers who were working—actually working!—nearby, we endeavoured to find out if there was any possible way of going on or round. How I wished I had taken up Italian at school! All they could say to us was "Napoli," and it became plain that they meant it was quite impossible to pass, and that we must go back to Naples, some three hundred miles away. Here we first produced our "magic chart" all beautifully written in Italian. This was one of several little notices, written out in different languages, with the details of our route. But although later it got us out of difficulties where nothing else availed, here it was useless, as the men could not read! But at last we made them understand that we simply must go on, and by showing them a handful of money persuaded them to construct a temporary path over the break. In about five minutes from the first vision of the "filthy lucre," fifteen men were rushing wildly back and forth with planks and bits of stone, for all the world like an army of ants, though with less perfect discipline.

When the bridge was completed, and the time came for me to drive the car across, every one of my passengers developed a different excuse for remaining out of the car. Of course, it *may* have been coincidence; but one thought that the reduction of weight would help, the other felt that it was a shame to let the occasion go unrecorded by his camera, and my husband, going one better, got a sudden longing to take a "Cine" film. But all went well until I was half-way across, when a running-board tool-box jammed on a plank. There I was stuck, daring to go neither backwards nor forwards, nor even to get out of the car. So, making the best of

a bad job, I decided, if drown I must, to drown in comfort! But the labourers developed a fit of energy so terrific that it ought to have "run all their bearings" —I expect the story of that brief spell of real work will be handed down in their families for many generations. Well, they dug me out, and I completed the crossing; and I really believe the gang was as proud of its work as we were relieved to overcome the obstacle. My husband handed them a fistful of *lire*; but, surprising as it may seem, in that place they knew so little of money, or of the simple art of division, that they begged me to take it back and share it out equally between them.

We still had about fifty miles of terribly mountainous road to cover; and it had begun to rain once more. But we felt that at last our luck was in, and there was no longer that wearing dread of the fresh danger or difficulty that might be lurking round each corner. If we had had to go back to Naples, over those dreadful roads, I really do not think that I should have had the heart to go on with the trip.

This had again been a day without meals; in fact, we had been too busy to think about food, even if it had been possible to obtain it. But the absence of decent hotels and the scarcity of motor-cars in the whole of Southern Italy may be taken as cause and effect—though which is which I am sure I cannot say. During our travels in this part of the country—from Naples onwards to Villa San Giovanni, that is to say—we encountered no more than four other motor-cars, three of which were broken down; one with a damaged back axle and the others with tyre troubles. These Italian motorists were rather funny. We would overtake them, *en panne*. Shortly, as I was going very steadily over the frightful road, one of them would come hurtling by, for the Italians simply cannot go at a steady pace—or so it seemed to me. In a very few miles we would overtake

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

"A BROKEN BRIDGE OVER A WIDE RIVER"

the car by the roadside again. In the case of one of those two, this process was repeated no fewer than five times, until, I suppose, the owner's stock of spare tubes was used up. Anyway, we waved him a derisive " good-bye " which turned out to be final, as we never saw him again.

CHAPTER FIVE

In which I nearly lose my husband, and, though not getting into "hot water" because of it, obtain a real hot bath at last; and showing how, though even Time ranged himself against us, we sailed to Africa in spite of him.

CHAPTER FIVE

EVENTUALLY we arrived at Villa San Giovanni in plenty of time for the last ferry-boat of the day for Messina, for which we had been aiming. And here we got our first taste of the " gangs " which we had been warned would be out to fleece us in this part of the world. It was not the last experience, unfortunately; but of that more anon. I drove the motor-car on to the boat without the slightest assistance from the crowd of navvies who were draped about the jetty; but after the short crossing to the Sicilian coast five of them—or their twin brothers, for they all looked alike to me, varying only in the particular degree of unpleasantness which characterized different specimens—combined in the arduous undertaking of laying planks upon which the car was to be driven off. Then they started positively blackguarding us for money, and things looked very ugly until a gallant French tourist bustled them off with a flow of Italian which sounded lovely, though it was probably as well I couldn't understand it. I suppose we should have thought ourselves lucky to get off so much more lightly than our gloomy friends of the London club had predicted, but this experience was so completely unexpected after the unfailing courtesy of the treatment which we had received in similar circumstances hitherto that we felt it was rather an inauspicious introduction to Sicily.

Anyhow, at last we found ourselves in the land of

earthquakes; rebuilding after the last great catastrophe in Messina has only just begun owing to the war and general shortness of funds, and even yet the peasants are living in the most amazing " temporary " hovels. And that introduction to Sicily of which I have spoken was typical of the atmosphere of the place. Apparently, money in sufficient quantities not being otherwise forthcoming, the visitor to the island is to be made to pay for the reconstruction; by fair means or foul the last possible *lira* is extracted from him. At the fine new hotel at which we stopped in Messina we were charged more for our accommodation than at any other town at which we had stayed, in spite of its bareness, coldness, lack of comfort generally, and entire absence of service.

I am afraid I am giving Messina a bad name, but one must " speak as one finds "; and my advice to those about to go there is—Don't! We spent one Sunday in the town, and apart from visiting the very pretty little new Catholic church, found there was so little to do that we were glad to get to bed, especially as the weather was unpleasantly cold. We noticed here for the first time the gaudy decorations on most of the farm carts. All kinds of pictures and dancing girls and cupids were painted on every possible space.

The following morning we started early upon what we expected to prove the most adventurous section of the whole trip. Leaving the town behind, the road took us inland up a steep, winding hill commanding a magnificent vista of the surrounding mountains. The view was so beautiful that I actually suggested to Mr. Johnson that he might indulge in photography without my grumbling. But he needed no encouragement! The words had barely left my mouth before he was out of the car and snapping everything. I really

Photo by W. H. Johnson

A FINE SPECIMEN OF SICILIAN OXEN

Photo by W. H. Johnson

BAD LANDSLIDE ON THE COAST ROAD

had to smile when he remarked that he was missing all the best pictures, having taken no more than three hundred up to date! The intention was to get to Termini for the night, and on the following day to go round the famous Targa Florio automobile race-course, but—to anticipate a little—the hotel at that place being closed, actually we had to do the full 160 miles to Palermo that day.

The one and only road proved to be little better than a cart track, and although the scenery was more beautiful than any we had seen, as usual the driver had little attention to spare from the management of the motor-car. As a matter of fact, on the one or two occasions when I simply could not resist feasting my eyes on the glorious view we nearly came to grief, so thereafter I had to content myself by listening to the eulogies of my companions. The road closely hugged the rugged coast, and from a driving point of view was most treacherous. Frequently landslides had so far encroached on the already narrow track that there was barely room to squeeze by, and though later we found that men were constantly at work keeping the road open for the mule and oxen traffic, we had disturbing visions of getting "hung up" half-way to everywhere! One landslide was so serious that we thought at first it would be impossible to squeeze the car through, but on approaching nearer found that it could just be managed. But we did not linger. As it was, ten o'clock had long passed when at last we ran into Palermo, after one of the loveliest but most trying drives of our tour. Not only was the road bad, tortuous and narrow, but we were plagued once again by a seemingly unending succession of level crossings, which, as usual in such cases, were always closed against us.

Having been more or less boxed up in the car for

a couple of days, my passengers seized the opportunities of these enforced halts to indulge their passion for photography; and once I went on for nearly half a mile before realizing that the rear seats of the saloon were empty! Stopping and looking back, I saw the missing passengers running after the car, waving wildly in the hope of attracting attention—though whether they really expected to catch a six-cylinder A.C. in full flight I never discovered. My husband was one of the runners. Usually he does not waste words, but on this occasion his few remarks were distinctly pointed. However, I emphasized the great advantage of a little gentle exercise on a trip like this, and the incident was closed.

After Termini those two might have had a chance of catching us up, for three miles an hour was frequently as much as I dared do. As so frequently happened in Italy, the last section of a long and trying day's drive proved to be the worst, and the final 26 miles into Palermo would linger in my memory as a positive nightmare were it not for the compensation we found in the beauty of Palermo itself. The thought that the following morning we should have to return over 26 miles of that hateful road in order to complete a few circuits of the Targa Florio was not pleasant. But we had arranged to do this, as I think I have said before, and we were all anxious to see the course where is held every year a contest that is considered the most gruelling in the world. But to return to Palermo: It was by far the finest town we had visited since leaving Rome; the streets were the widest and best, and the hotel the most comfortable. Need I say that delight at getting a real bath at last made the horrible run from Termini seem almost worth while?

Arranging to meet at breakfast at ten o'clock next morning—Tuesday—we quite forgot our intention of

immediately checking our information as to sailings for Tunis. The first boat, we had been told, left on Thursday, and, as I said, it had been intended to spend the intervening day in exploring the Targa Florio course, though whether I should have faced that drive back to Termini is rather problematical. But in the morning, being about earlier than was necessary, I took the opportunity to send off some telegrams, and suddenly remembered the query as to sailings.

"What time does the Tunis boat leave on Thursday?" I asked the hall porter—who spoke excellent English, by the way.

"Thursday?" he repeated. "There's no boat on Thursday. One goes at midday to-day, and after that there is no other with accommodation for motor-cars for a fortnight!"

It took some moments for the significance of the information to dawn upon my intelligence. But suddenly I realized that all our plans were ruined!

Something must be done, and quickly, too! Just then my husband came strolling, in care-free and leisurely fashion, into the lounge. Seizing him by the arm and nearly pulling him over, I almost screamed:

"The boat leaves at twelve o'clock TO-DAY! Quick! Don't start arguing!" He hadn't opened his mouth! "Do something!"

With that I rushed out of the hotel, calling to our R.A.C. observer on the way:

"Sailing twelve to-day. Can't stop to explain. Meet us shipping office!"

It was rather like one of my Press telegrams, but he followed on dutifully.

Ten o'clock, and the boat left at twelve. And I couldn't speak Italian! I am sure they must have thought we were mad when we reached the offices of

the shipping company, and they certainly couldn't understand the jumble of languages to which I treated them. But at last I found a man who could at least get the sense of my French, and when the idea that I would pay anything to get the car on board had sunk in, he led us to the Holy of Holies of the Italian State Railways. At first we were somewhat coldly received, but it was a good sign that the high official whom we interviewed spoke fluent English. But neither the politeness nor the fluency of his words made them the more heartening :

" I am very, very sorry, but I am afraid it is quite impossible. There is no room on the boat, which has accommodation for one car only, and that is already occupied."

I nearly burst into tears at this, and showed so much emotion that the official was impressed with the very real urgency of the situation from our point of view. Gradually we told him all the sad story—how missing the boat would mean kicking our heels uselessly in Palermo for a fortnight and then driving day and night for weeks afterwards to catch up to schedule. He got quite enthusiastic over the idea of our tour and what we had already done, and was even sufficiently interested to ask the make of our little car, as he was thinking of getting a new one, and might as well try an English brand. Good work; but it wasn't getting us anywhere, I thought to myself. But the deed was done. Our friend telephoned to the captain of the ship, and told us that so far as he was concerned we could take the car on board, though we must get the official sanction of the captain, who would have to see the car first in order to know how many cattle he would have to unload to make room. We were given until five to twelve to do all that was necessary.

All this had taken time, of course, and we had less

Photo by W. H. Johnson

ONE OF ITALY'S MANY LEVEL CROSSINGS

Photo by W. H. Johnson

"WE WISHED ITALY A HEARTFELT FAREWELL"

To face p. 79

than three-quarters of an hour in which to get back to the hotel, find our passengers, dig the car out of a crowded garage, and get back to the quay. The passengers were both missing—of course! We were in despair. Again I could have sat down right there and cried.

There was nothing for it but to go and get the motor-car, leaving a message for the others at the hotel in case they did turn up—and when I found that our observer had very sensibly gone ahead of us and somehow had wheeled out the car ready to start, at last I began to hope. Back we dashed for our luggage, found the last missing passenger, and arrived helter-skelter on the quay just as the boat's warning whistle blew. As I drove up the gangway between ship and shore, once again the tool-box, which was fitted beneath the running board, stuck. There I was, suspended in mid-air; and I gave a shriek of terror as the siren sounded for the last time. But the ship waited until we had got the car unstuck, and as I drove on deck at last, I breathed a very reverent "Thank God!" and wished Italy a heartfelt farewell.

In the meantime, we had been warned to look out for pick-pockets and all the breed of petty thieves. Among other things, we were advised to remove everything of value from the car, as anything "attachable" would be detached. Remembering this a little later, I made a rush on deck and found that the principal thing—my beloved mascot, which has been many thousands of miles with my husband and myself—was still all present and correct. The doors were already locked, I found, so I carried off the mascot to my state-room and locked it up also.

It was not at all a comfortably fitted or pleasant ship. We rolled about in every direction without rhyme or reason, and the less said about my experiences during

the eighteen or twenty hours' voyage the better! But before succumbing entirely, I was interested and amazed to learn that there is actually a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in existence in Italy. We happened to meet the organizer on board, and gathered that lack of funds was the reason why the effect of the society's efforts was not more apparent. Much of the money that is available comes from England, apparently; but I was given to understand that Signor Mussolini is a great lover of animals, and has done much to further the work of the organization. The official whom we met told us that he and his wife devote most of their lives to the rescue of uncared-for and ill-treated animals—dogs, particularly. They live in Naples, and make a point of collecting all the ugliest mongrels that they can find, since these are the most likely to be sufferers. They keep no fewer than seven of these waifs as pets at home!

Well, well! Let me draw a kindly curtain over my own sufferings on that ship! On the morrow once more we fell among thieves; so, as there has been plenty of trial and tribulation in this chapter, I think I will start a fresh one.

CHAPTER SIX

In which Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves try conclusions with us; and illustrating how a moral victory may still leave one out of pocket.

CHAPTER SIX

AWAKENING soon after six o'clock the next morning, I suppose by the changing motion of the ship—for I had not had at all a good night!—I eagerly went on deck to catch my first glimpse of a real Arab town. Here I found my husband, who had been up and about for the last hour, the rolling of the ship having evidently interfered with his slumbers also. But the "Maritime Canal" through which one approaches Tunis is very monotonous and disappointing. It took the ship two hours to crawl the eight kilometres into port, with the result that it was about nine o'clock before we could get ashore. The first Arab whom I saw, or at any rate noticed, was a very elaborate individual. He was, we found afterwards, in charge of the gang which transhipped the car, but looked strong enough to have lifted the car off himself, unaided. He wore the latest thing in striped bath gowns—a *burnous*, I suppose the garment would be called—which appeared to be much more suitable for lounging on Brighton beach than for his arduous task of superintendence.

I christened him Ali Baba on the spot; little knowing how appropriate the name would turn out to be. Later he produced his Forty Thieves, but in the meantime was all suavity and anxiety to help. He seemed as interested in us as we were in him—I, frankly, couldn't keep my eyes off him!—and informed us that the car would be lifted on to the quay at "*Deux heures*." Until then, therefore, we had to kill time, and looked about for a

vehicle to take us to our hotel. I do not know exactly what I had expected to find as the local means of transport—rickshaws, my husband helpfully suggested—but the very common or garden *voitures* which we actually found scarcely seemed in keeping with the Eastern atmosphere. Not that it was hot. Far from it! Instead of the tropical climate for which we had prepared, having shipped all our warm clothing back to England, Africa had apparently got shifted to the frigid zone, with a particularly biting form of what at home we should call an east wind.

Anyway, the comfort of the very homelike Transatlantique hotel was very welcome; and still greater was the relief when we realized that the staff and everything about the place was French, and not Italian. Some of our experiences of Italian hotels and hotel-keepers were, as I have said before, rather unfortunate, and it may have been largely by contrast with the conditions upon which we had just turned our backs that the Tunis hotel stays in my memory as one of the most pleasant of the whole tour. It was, in any case, the only place at which we were able to take a two-days' rest, owing to catching the Tunis boat two days earlier than had been expected and not wishing to arrive in advance of our schedule at future places. So we all appreciated the change from continuous motoring.

Later in the day, having called at the post office—this time with a good grace on my part, since Tunis was one of the places on my own schedule, so that we all received a very satisfactory mail—we went on down to the quay. There, standing all alone, was the little A.C., though how they got it there was beyond me, since the car had been left with the brakes hard on and all the doors locked, and one would have imagined that it could not be handled. Ali Baba must have carried the motor-car off on his shoulder, after all, I think!

But about this time Mr. A. Baba and myself ceased to be friends. Having had our papers returned to us, all in disorder,[1] my husband spent the next hour in the customs-house, trying to make them unstamp everything, which only resulted in making the muddle worse than ever. Eventually he returned. And then the music began. Headed by the Arch Robber, the Forty Thieves surrounded us, making an odd assortment of noises in Arabic, mingled occasionally with broken French and shattered English. Being quick in the uptake, and having gone through a somewhat similar experience in Sicily, we gathered that nothing but the immediate application of soothing balm in the shape of money would reduce the inflammation. But this was not a matter for haphazard *baksheesh*, for Ali Baba presented us with no fewer than three sets of documents, each made out for a different amount, and informed us that we could not leave without settling up.

The odds were too unequal, so, producing all the local currency we had—the equivalent of about £15—we tendered it to Ali Baba. Grabbing the money, he turned and beckoned to us to follow him, leading us to a bureau, where another robber presented us with yet a fourth bill, this being for 700 francs. This was too much of a good thing, and I got furious, demanding what it was all about, as we had already paid for the shipping of the car at Palermo. But we had evidently been badly "had," as when I was asked for the receipts and pointed out that these had been handed with the other documents to Ali Baba, and had not been returned with the rest of the papers, that brilliantly begowned individual denied all knowledge of them. In

[1] *These people have a happy habit of stamping everything they can see in your customs book, regardless of the complications they set up for the poor motorist who is continuing his journey into other countries.*

view of the absence of proof, we were told that we must pay for the shipping all over again, plus the 700 francs for something which wasn't at all clear.

But I stamped my foot and, taking matters out of my husband's hands, declared that I wouldn't pay, and anyway had nothing but English money left.

"Dat is quite good money," the forty-second thief assured me; and, like an idiot, I handed over five crisp, clean English £1 notes.

He held it in his hand and grinned, making some remark about the money being a deposit, which would be returned in the morning—"*un peu*," he added in an aside which I caught.

"A little of it!" I exclaimed; "you mean most of it!" And I snatched the money from No. 42's hand, flipped the notes under Ali's nose, and made a rush for the car, determined to get away if possible, but otherwise to sleep in the saloon on the quay if necessary, rather than be fleeced right and left like this. But I caught the whole gang unawares, and, ably seconded by my trusty passengers, we were off before our intention was appreciated. Scattering the Forty Thieves—with klaxon and exhaust fumes instead of the boiling oil which should have been their portion—we drove straight to the hotel to make protests and inquiries.

Apparently our mistake had been in regarding the people on the quay as bona fîde customs agents, instead of which they were merely employés of the particular shipping contractor into whose hands we were so unfortunate as to fall. There are, we learnt, several such gangs carrying on their lucrative operations right under the noses of the proper firms—such as the Transatlantique company itself—and in view of the fact that the latter charges the equivalent of thirty shillings for the service for which we were asked 700 francs, apart from the sheer theft of £15, it is plainly wise to

Photo by W. H. Johnson

THE NATIVE QUARTER OF TUNIS

Photo by W. H. Johnson

DIVISION OF LABOUR IN ITALY

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make arrangements for transhipment in advance with some properly organized firm. But one buys experience; and the only consolation, except that we shall know better next time, is that as a result of our representations some effort will be made in future to put a stop to this form of swindling.

For the next two days we divided our time between trying to get our money back and sightseeing. But as a matter of fact there did not seem to be a great deal to see at Tunis, beyond the native *soûk,* and this we visited again and again, in the fascination of the novel surroundings. Looking back, however, I think Tunis is the cleanest and most sanitary of the coast cities.

But no sooner had the excitement over the recovery of the car simmered down than that passenger whose vice was photography got a particularly bad attack. He had been living for days in an atmosphere of anticipation of seeing the ruins of Carthage; and was so impatient to be off that we could hardly get him to sit down to a meal. Naturally, he wanted us to take the car, but I went on strike—having got it safely into its garage, I wouldn't take it out again for anything! Not even the allurement of cold stones and long-dead mummies could move me!

So we left him to the tender mercy of the local trams, and when he returned and was asked what he had seen, all he would say was that "it was very wonderful." I didn't believe there was much to see, anyway, while we had made the most interesting explorations in the *soûk*—so interesting, in fact, that we got lost for nearly six hours.

With the usual stranger's conception of trading methods in the East—is North Africa "the East," by the way?—I bargained with everybody about everything, and spent a total of one-and-eightpence! This sum purchased a native tapestry, hand-made, of course,

which was supposed to have three months' work in it. But this love of haggling, which I thought was an essentially Eastern trait, is at any rate not general in Tunis. I was much impressed with the salesmanship of many of the stall-keepers, and especially with their dignity. And I was very much crushed by the almost contemptuous remark of one merchant, in reply to my effort to beat down the price of some article:

"We do not waste our time in bargaining!"

In the same connection I had another rather amusing experience. I had a desire to take home a bedspread worked in the local style of embroidery, and calling at the first stall in the bazaar, they produced the identical article I wanted—price, 1,000 francs. I offered 250, thinking this quite the proper thing to do, and was much surprised to receive a dignified and perfectly definite refusal. But, apart altogether from any question of bargaining, the price asked was much more than I meant to pay. So we tried elsewhere.

At the next "shop" they had not such a bedspread in stock, but if we would wait a few minutes, it should be obtained. We waited; it came. But a still higher price was asked for what did not appear to be a better quality article than the first. Sadly we went out and tried again. This went on down the whole length of the *soûk*. At some places they could not oblige, and at others asked us to wait while such a bedspread was procured. Steadily the price rose; and steadily the length of time which it took for the spread to be brought increased, until it was perfectly obvious that the first one we had seen was following us through the bazaar! At the last inquiry the price had increased to 2,000 francs, and while we had some idea of chasing the thing back again to get a lower figure, it seemed better to admit defeat, and "steal silently away!"

Undaunted and unashamed, however, we paid

several more visits to the *soûk*, so fascinating were the novel scenes. And here I came upon what I found to be a common enough scene, though at first it struck me with something like horror—children of four and even three years working as seriously and apparently as efficiently as their elders! There is no end to the variety of tasks that are set the little ones, but in Tunis the thing that excited my indignation was the sight of tiny tots holding the yarn while it was spun, in the making of the native tapestry. I expect the piece which I purchased had involved the grinding away of three months of some kiddy's life, and the thought rather spoils one's appreciation of the beauty and novelty of the work.

In spite of the lack of variety of interest in Tunis, we were rather sorry when the time approached to proceed with the tour, because the two days' stay there had been a very welcome rest after the real hard work of driving over the Italian and Sicilian roads. But when we did get going, what a relief it was to find a good and reasonably straight highway! For the first time since leaving Monte Carlo I was able to "step on the gas" and let her rip! And, also for the first time, my passengers actually broke into song. It was that plaintive ditty known, all over the world, I believe, as "The Frothblowers' Anthem"; but after a little of it I joined in with a paraphrase—"the more we are together the angrier I'll be," or words to that effect. They took the hint, and simmered down.

We had decided on leaving Tunis to compress two days' driving into one, in order to reach Constantine, described as "the most extraordinary of all the natural fortresses of North Africa, and maybe of the world," on the Saturday night, so that we might spend the Sunday in inspecting the marvels of the place. After some difficulty in finding the way out of Tunis, and completely

circling the town before discovering the right outlet, we struck the beautiful road I have already referred to. For the first twenty-eight kilometres a good tarmac surface was laid, but even though thereafter it degenerated somewhat into a red dirt road, the going was still not at all bad.

The hotel at Tunis had been so good in every respect that for the first time in the whole of our tour we had something in the nature of a luncheon-basket put up, knowing it was unlikely that we should be able to get a proper meal *en route*—or, for that matter, have time to spare on the long run to sit down to a real lunch. So we carried on steadily, putting the miles behind us in most satisfactory manner until, having passed through the town of Beja, we reached the hilly road which would take us to the coast through the weirdly-named Kanguet-Kef-Tout. Soon after leaving the latter place we came upon a little rippling brook that had come tumbling down from the mountains especially to afford us an ideal picnicking place in the warm sunshine. The rest, in those pleasant surroundings, was very welcome, as was the food—though we did have some little difficulty in persuading ourselves that long French rolls slit in half and lined with ham were every bit as good as dainty English sandwiches! Still, if the task of biting a way through these rolls did make our jaws rather tired, we neither grumbled nor felt like grumbling. Everything seemed to be going right on this day, somehow.

Photo by W. H. Johnson

A PUNCTURE ON THE ROAD TO KANGUET-KEF-TOUT

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CHAPTER SEVEN

In which we drive out of Tunisia into Algeria, narrowly escaping being shot by the frontier guard in the process; and showing how we found an English kitchen garden on the outskirts of the desert.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HASTILY clearing up—once the habit is acquired, one doesn't leave bits of paper lying about even in the wilds of Africa—we started anew on the journey to Constantine. The road remained good, but after a while entirely changed in character, and we then had our first taste of desert scenery. Gradually, rolling sand-dunes grew up on either side of the road, and even the surface over which we had to travel was composed of soft, red sand —the sand of the desert, as we found during trips into the Sahara some days later. But matters had been proceeding too smoothly. After climbing about eight miles up a long hill, I was able to coast down the other side, at the bottom of which lay the little village of Babouch. In the joy of the smooth, silent motion I clean forgot that this was the Tunisian frontier post, and dashed past the *douane*. Hearing shouts, we looked back and saw soldiers dancing excitedly in the road, and immediately realized, of course, what we had done. I reversed back and we exercised our French in apology. But the soldiers were a sporting lot, knowing, no doubt, that even if we had not gone back, we should have been very unlikely to succeed in rushing the Algerian post, farther on. As a matter of fact, we were gravely warned not to make a similar mistake at Lacroix, as the post is named, as the guardians there would have no hesitation

in shooting. Brrrh! And only the thin fabric of a Weymann body to stop the bullets! We wondered if they would prove good marksmen—and decided not to risk it! So we inspected every hut and hovel over the next kilometre or so with the greatest possible care. At last the "Doings," as, for simplicity's sake, I had taken to call the *douane*, hove in sight. As I may have remarked before, it is a lot easier to get out of a country than to get in, and, in view of the awful state of confusion into which the officials had put our papers at Tunis, we had serious apprehensions of difficulty in entering Algeria. The official who attended to us, however, was extremely nice about it, though much annoyed over the blunders which, he said, are constantly being made with the documents of tourists from Tunisia. We were so relieved and so pleased at the speed with which we were passed through this dreaded frontier that we felt we must give the official a handsome *pourboire*. But he very politely and with much dignity refused to accept it, saying simply, and in good English, that he was only too happy to have been of service. With very kindly feelings, apparently on both sides, we departed, entering the sixth country which we had visited in the last two weeks—if, as I claim, Sicily can be called a separate country. I have had lots of arguments on this point; but I maintain that, whatever the facts of the case, I ought to be allowed to call it a country, as it was equal to a dozen for sheer hard work! So, Algeria was our sixth country. That is the beauty of writing a book. You can say what you like without being corrected at every turn by people who will be so painfully precise!

At La Calle, on the coast, we had the most unromantic experience of filling up with fuel from a petrol pump. For a while it rather detracted from the glamour of the wonderful scenery, but, the road continuing quite good, we soon forgot about it as new beauties were steadily

unfolded before our eyes. A worse trouble awaited us, however, and unfortunately it was one which we experienced every day during our run across the north of Africa. This was the painful glare of the setting sun, and although the actual dusk is very short-lived, for some hours before the sun took its plunge below the western horizon, driving along the nearly horizontal beams was something approaching agony. Next time I will drive eastwards—and start late enough to avoid the rising sun!

We followed the main road to Guelma, and as by this time I was really needing some relief from the trying glare, we pulled up at the only hotel which the place possessed, where the most obliging French *patronne* made us a pot of really good, strong tea. The occasion stands out in my memory, as it was one of the very few when we were able to get tea that was drinkable—and I don't care for coffee! As we had frankly admitted defeat by the sun, we stayed long enough at this hotel to avoid further trouble for this evening at least, and it was practically dark when we got going again, and tackled the difficult mountain road over the remainder of the distance to Constantine.

There are, consequently, no " high spots " in my recollections of this part of the journey; but I do remember the difficulty we had in getting to the hotel at Constantine, long after we had seen its brightly illuminated sign high up in the sky. The hotel was perched near the top of a high hill a little way out on the outskirts of the town, and various roads appeared to lead to it. The first we tried ran too low, and took us round the hill far below the hotel. The next " Corniche " went too high, and it was only at the third attempt that we reached our much-needed haven, which, in the morning, we found to be pitched in the midst of a most English appearing garden. Most remarkable of all, in Africa,

on the little path to the garage I came across a real, homely " kitchen garden," with the first delicate shoots of early peas peeping through the earth. But at the time of our arrival we could only see the twinkling lights of the town far below us, and I longed for the morning, so that I could feast my eyes on the grandeur that I knew must be there.

The difficulties of the latter part of the day had driven from my mind all idea of what day of the week it was, and I was feeling very regretful that here was yet another place which we should have to leave early in the morning without doing more than glance at it. But there you are. By reason of the special nature of our tour, it had to be; but although so far we had traversed only a small portion of North Africa, I had already made up my mind to revisit some of the places which we had so ruthlessly " done," and give them the attention which was their due. Then with a sigh of relief I remembered that to-morrow would be Sunday, and Constantine, at least, would not be quite so cavalierly treated.

On awaking in the morning, we found that the veranda of our bedroom had a magnificent view over the gorge, above the precipitous sides of which the town is built, and one could see fifty miles or more out into the great plateau which surrounds the precipice. The reason for describing Constantine as a natural fortress then became plain. The gorge, through which runs the torrent of the Rhummel, almost encircles the town, and the task of crossing the chasm to attack the " fortress " would be almost impossible in the face of a very small defending force. Slender bridges now cross the gorge at different points, and " suburbs " have broken out on the opposing face. Entirely different in character, Constantine yet reminded us somewhat of Naples, which it even surpassed in absolute natural

Photo by W. H. Johnson

THE GORGE, CONSTANTINE

Photo by W. H. Johnson

A STREET IN TUNIS

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grandeur. We thoroughly explored the town both afoot and awheel, and were greatly interested in the narrow streets and overhanging houses, and not a little impressed with a drive over a road on the verge of the chasm which repeatedly disappears into the living rock. Here there were little openings, heavily barred, through which one could look down on the 600 feet drop to the torrent in the bed of the gorge, or let one's eyes roam out over the illimitable distance of the surrounding plateau.

The feminine Jewish population of Constantine, we had been told, have a quaint custom of heavily painting their faces. This we discovered to be quite true, and applying to all classes, the only difference being apparently that the better off the girls may be, the more paint they use.

When evening arrived we felt thoroughly satisfied with our day, and had acquired such a taste for Africa that we sat down in the lounge and proceeded to plan how we could crowd the utmost experience into the very limited time at our disposal. Schedule, of course, was a fetish which had to be lived up to, even though we missed all the best that there was to see. But, in view of the success of our plan of driving straight through from Tunis to Constantine, instead of staying for a night at Bona, as we had originally intended, we schemed several similar adventures, in order especially to be able to spare a day or so for investigation of the desert. On the following day—Monday—we had meant to make for Bougie only; now we decided to drive right on to Algiers, thus getting one day in hand. And we had been told the roads of Morocco were even better than those of Algeria, so that we should have little difficulty in making up time, even if a trip to the Sahara put us a bit behind.

And on these resolutions we slept.

Once again we started early in the morning, for although we should not touch Bougie, the run to Algiers, even by the most direct road, would be a long one. Carrying on through Oued Athmenia, the road was quite good as to surface, and was flat and straight—with eight-mile stretches reminiscent of the French *routes nationales*—which enabled us to put up a very fine average. Perhaps it was as well that the scenery was not particularly interesting, for our thoughts were now more set on reaching Algiers than in spending time sight-seeing along the route. Setif was reached much too early for lunch, so we pushed on to Bordjbu Arreridj, only to find the place somewhat uninviting from a food point of view, as well as unpronounceable! This meant that we must reconcile ourselves to the crossing of the mountains known as the *Chaine des Bibans* before stopping for a meal. In this part of the run the country became much more interesting, though peculiarly desolate. In the background were the snow-clad peaks of the distant Djebel Dujura—a range which we saw from so many conflicting points of view as the road twisted and turned through the minor mountains which we were crossing that we could scarcely believe it was always the same mountains—and the land round about had a burnt-up, waste, end-of-the-world appearance. We kept to the main road to Palestro, where we had a belated lunch, and then tackled a short cut across the hills to Le Fondonk. At first the surface degenerated badly, but the actual pass was one of the finest pieces of road engineering that I have seen anywhere out of France. The road wound up and up, with easy bends too numerous to mention, and a steady gradient of about one in ten for quite eleven miles. It is difficult to convey in words how this road kept turning upon itself, each successive terrace taking one ever a little higher, but some idea may be gained from the fact

that I repeatedly saw a kilometre stone on the road upon which we were actually running separated by 100 yards or less as the crow flies from the previous one on the terrace below. This went on until we had reached an altitude of about 3,000 feet; and from the summit we had a wonderful view of Algiers in the far distance.

Eventually we came upon the main road again, and found it to be of *pavé*, in good condition, but a little trying to drive upon nevertheless. Soon after passing El Achir we had a little excitement in the shape of a race with a train, the driver of which entered into the spirit of the thing, and waved encouragingly to us each time a closed level crossing gave him a temporary advantage. In the open we seemed to be pretty well matched, and repeatedly crossed over railway bridges as the train puffed through the tunnel beneath. Our handicap was the winding nature of the road, and the frequent level crossings; his the fact that we were miles better in acceleration and hill-climbing ability. We eventually won the race, the train being forced to stop at a station. This mild excitement served to buck up our flagging spirits towards the end of the long run, and just as we were nearing Algiers I saw the sight for which I had been looking ever since we first set foot in Africa—camels! In Tunis I had hunted camels in vain, without even coming upon their spoor, and had very nearly come to the conclusion that the existence of the beasts in that part of the continent was a myth. But on the outskirts of Algiers we found a number of them in every-day use—a discovery which, of course, necessitated delay for much clicking of camera shutters by our photographically-inclined friend—who, by the way, was making his last run with us, as the calls of England, home and duty, or beauty, as the case may be, required that he should sail from Algiers. This being so, I hadn't the heart to check his innocent amusement—for once!

Anyway, it was about seven o'clock when we had negotiated the difficult traffic of the town and had reached the luxurious Hôtel St. George, where, after dinner, we went anew into the question of the morrow's proposed trip to the desert.

CHAPTER EIGHT

In which we answer the Call of the Desert, avoiding various ills, and experiencing the bitterly cold atmosphere of the sun-scorched spaces at night.

CHAPTER EIGHT

At last dawned the day when we were to see the real Africa. I think the much storied and sung Call of the Desert must be in everyone's blood, even without previous experience of the wonderful boundless spaces, the fascinating monotony of the all-pervading dun colouring, the blazing sky, and the most amazing sense of isolation that descends upon one so soon as the Sahara is entered. It was a very real Call in the case of all of us, at least; and I for one regretted each moment which delayed our departure. We had previously put our heads together over sundry maps, and had fixed upon a spot in the Nothingness of the Sahara as a reasonable point for which to aim. This was the oasis of Laghouat, some three hundred miles distant, which, we were informed, was as far into the desert as normal motor-cars could penetrate. The question of possibility was entirely wrapped up in the problem, Could we do the journey in a day, returning, in order to make a round trip, by way of another oasis, Bou Saâda, after only three days' absence from Algiers?

I knew it must mean pretty hard work for me, since I was still sticking to the wheel, and had now reasonable hope of being able to continue to the end. But one becomes innured to long daily distances; we all wanted to go to the Sahara, and I didn't mind having to pay by a little extra work. Besides, driving is a pleasure when conditions are reasonably good. And I am sure all my passengers felt the same—in fact, I remember that

later on, when for some reason I suggested giving up the idea of visiting some place (Marrakesh, I think it was) which lay off our official itinerary, and consequently involved a bit of "overtime," even our R.A.C. observer told me "not to be fainthearted." But that is by the way. What clinched the matter, in regard to Laghouat, was the definite information that although we should be travelling right into the wilderness, the road was first class.

So having said good-bye to Mr. Johnson, who had to return to Europe on that day's boat, off we went, under the sunny African sky, leaving Algiers at about eight o'clock on the main road to Blîdah, a town some thirty miles away. A few miles beyond that place, however, we had the misfortune to take the wrong road at a fork, owing to the absence of any signpost, and as there was no one to direct us at this spot, there seemed nothing else to do but keep going. Doubt grew the farther we went, and when we found that the Atlas de Blîdah mountains, which we knew we should have to cross, were disappearing on our left, doubt became certainty. Also, the road rapidly lost all pretence to the first-class standard which we had been led to expect, and when we had gone about ten miles out of our way the surface became quite impossible. But, bad as it was, I will say that comprehensive repairing operations were in progress. Many of the stone-breakers whom we found in groups along the wayside were women, their faces weirdly streaked with black paint. I had been too busy arguing as to whether we were on the right road to pay much attention to them and their quaint huts of mud-plastered canvas as we passed, but, having made the best of a bad job and turned in our tracks, crashing and rocking back over the same dreadful surface, it seemed a pity to let the unusual sight go unrecorded. I felt

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

THE OASIS OF LAGHOUAT

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

THE GORGE DE LA CHIFFA

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safe in suggesting a few snapshots, since our principal camera fiend had left us at Algiers—and my husband is usually as difficult to get started on photography as he was to stop!

I don't know what natives in other parts of the world may be like in their attitude towards the camera, though I have a vague idea that somewhere the making or taking of a portrait is against their religion. At first I thought that this must be the case here, for as soon as the cameras were produced there was a general scuttling for the roadside dwellings. And then I noticed that a certain section of the road repairers had not fled—and that those who remained were the women! We tried to coax the more modest sex (in this case!) out of their retirement, unavailingly; but the women posed and smirked as to the manner born! Well, on we went, like a small boat in a choppy sea, and I began to feel that no car on earth could stand this sort of treatment, especially after the already painful gruelling of Italy. And a little later on, as a matter of fact, the constant strain and vibration caused one of our few serious casualties—a track arm broke. Producing a spare, like a conjurer (though I don't think he kept it in his hat!) my husband had the part fitted in scarcely more than quarter of an hour, and we continued our way back to the fork.

The right road here led us to the wonderful Gorge de la Chiffa, the grandeur of which I find it hard to put into words. The road wound in and out and round about between towering cliffs, down which tumbled frequent streams and springs and waterfalls. In the bright sunlight it was like a bit of fairyland; though I could imagine that the Inferno might be a better simile under a gloomy sky. But it doesn't seem to run to gloom in this part of Africa! I am afraid that we did not linger long to admire, as with twenty wasted miles

and a stop for repairs, the task of reaching Laghouat that night was beginning to look rather more serious. As it was, we simply had to stop for more photos before hastening on towards Boghari, through the lovely vineyards in the neighbourhood of Medea. By this time, however, it had turned lunch time, as we very well knew—having made the mistake, in our eagerness to get away, of forgetting to provide against the possibility that food would not be obtainable on the road. Thoughts of grilled steak—and even onions—began to thrust themselves forward, to the partial exclusion of admiration of the splendid road and wonderful scenery through which we were passing, but we had to satisfy our gnawing hunger with some chocolate, the only provision which we had with us. Even Boghari seemed to offer no opportunity of repairing the deficiency, though I have learnt since that there is a Transatlantique hotel there which would soon have put matters right. Still, we didn't know it at the time, and having left the town behind, the last hope for many a long mile was gone. It became more and more obvious that food would have to be forgotten, because we had at last come unmistakably upon the Sahara. Boghari, I believe, is known as "the balcony of the desert," and so it proved.

Bravely we refused to let our realization that we had answered the Call be spoiled by unromantic miseries! Gaily our motor-car thrust her dear little nose forwards into the mysteries ahead of us! But I will admit to a rather creepy feeling after a mile or so as the impression of absolute aloneness of the desert impressed itself upon me; and it may be that I had a few uneasy wonderings as to what would happen to us if anything serious did go wrong with the A.C.

In spite of the desolation of the district—it is only the outskirts of the desert really, of course—the road

continued good, and we made a high average for the next few hours. And then an even more serious problem than the question of revictualling ourselves presented itself. Petrol. The carburettor politely asked if we had forgotten this, as, with a splutter, it indicated the need for turning the reserve tap to "low level." I am thoroughly ashamed to say we had.

I stopped, and we pored anxiously over our maps. So far as my husband could estimate, we were twenty or more miles from Djelfa, which was not only the nearest group of habitations of any kind, but was the last place at which there was even a remote possibility of getting fuel until we arrived at Laghouat. The reserve supply in the tank was good for about twenty-five miles, which would leave very little margin. So there was nothing for it but to push on and hope for the best, though we had serious doubts of being able to get replenishments even if the petrol did hold out until we got to Djelfa.

In the meantime, darkness had fallen, and with the absence of all sign of human life added to our worries over the fuel and the distance, that last few miles of the drive was an unpleasantly eerie experience. At last lights flickered in the distance, and we knew that we were saved from the worst possibility, of having to spend at least the night in the desert.

But Djelfa didn't look very promising, from the little we could see of it. There seemed to be nothing but native huts, and immediately we stopped a swarm of little Arab children scrambled all over the car. There was not a European in sight, the kiddies were making the weirdest of noises in Arabic, and it was obviously useless to try and explain what we wanted to them, in English, at any rate. So we tried a deaf-and-dumb language of our own, and were as much amazed as delighted to find that they were unusually intelligent,

and tumbled to the idea almost at once. Within a few moments some of them, who had rushed away, came struggling back with a real, live can of petrol. This sudden end to the awful anxiety of the last hour was almost too good to be true, and I am afraid I must confess to a few tears of sheer, unadulterated joy!

And then a white man hove in sight—a Frenchman, who kindly volunteered to lead us to a place where we could obtain much needed refreshment for ourselves. This place turned out to be, at first sight, an ordinary Arab drinking-house. It was full to the doorway of natives squatting on benches and on the floor, all arguing away at the tops of their voices at a terrific pace. I didn't quite see how we were going to sit down to a meal among them—because there was no room, if for no other reason; but our guide threaded a way through the various groups and through a doorway into an inner room, where we were cheered by the sight of a glorious log fire. It may seem strange to those who have not visited Africa, and imagine the desert to be a waste burnt up by incessant scorching sunshine, but at that time of year, the middle of February, I can say from experience that the nights are bitterly cold. I have not mentioned it before, but we were all half frozen when we arrived at Djelfa—which had not helped to dissipate our other troubles!

And what with one thing and another, I had managed to develop the most fiendish headache! It had been getting worse all the afternoon, and I suppose the warmth and comfort of the room made me unconsciously relax so that the wretched thing could get full play. I felt I simply could not drive any farther that night, and would willingly have stayed anywhere rather than go on. But on inquiry we found that the few rooms they had at this very modest hostelry were occupied. Apart from the native quarters, the place existed only on

account of the proximity of a French military camp. As a matter of fact, while we were resting the thought had come to me that we were a very small and unprotected party in the midst of an absolutely native village of unknown possibilities, and I recalled the many joking warnings that had been given me at home to "mind I didn't get kidnapped!" But the knowledge that we were in an area under French military control put things in a different light; while the very homely sight of an English bull-terrier sitting on the mat awaiting the return of his master from the camp did even more to dispel any latent fears.

Resigned to the necessity to continue to Laghouat, we waited to see what would be produced in the way of food with more than a little curiosity, although as I am a lover of good, plain English fare I scarcely expected to be able to eat the native dishes that would surely be provided. And, to be perfectly honest, I don't remember what they did put before us, except that the tea, bad as it was compared with the pot which we had at Guelma some days before, was very welcome indeed.

CHAPTER NINE

In which a front wheel skid at a mile a minute nearly "puts paid" to the tour; and showing how a nightmare may be nearly as bad as the real thing.

CHAPTER NINE

We wasted very little more time at this outpost of the desert, since there was still about sixty miles to do. The road at once became even more desert like, the track being one, in the light of our head-lamps, with the surrounding waste. It is a habit—or a fault, if you like!—of mine when I am tired or dispirited to drive extra fast, not so much in order to get the journey over quickly as to give myself something interesting to do. And after leaving Djelfa I certainly did push the little car along. The hum of the engine doing a steady sixty was very cheering! What an adventure it seemed! I think I forgot my headache in the excitement of rushing through the still night. But we were to get a little more adventure than was really pleasant.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, there loomed ahead the beginning of a sharp bend to the left. Applying both sets of brakes I tried to pull up, but soon saw that there was every likelihood of our overshooting the corner. Then the car developed a front wheel skid, and even now I cannot tell how I pulled her round. It was touch and go for some seconds, and as there was a drop of about ten feet on either side of the road, which was built on a kind of embankment through a *wady*, I do not think there would have been much hope for us if the car had left the road. Again the thought struck me that in the event of accident we should probably not be found for days—but I mustn't be gruesome!

and unmistakably I saw two enormously tall Arabs standing over me with naked scimitars in their hands. I could even see the reflection of the moonlight on the blades. Of course, I was petrified with fright at first, but as they made no move to attack me, I called to my husband, and eventually succeeded in waking him up.

"Look," I whispered, "there are two Arabs—armed—they're going to murder us!"

"Don't be silly!" he replied. "It's only those two pointed windows with the moon shining through them!" And, turning over, he went off to sleep again.

I could see then that he was right—but that's all the sympathy you get! In the morning I had another good look at those peculiar windows, and couldn't for the life of me make out how the illusion had come about. Just nerves, I s'pose.

The hour must have been fairly late at the time of this little interlude, but the tom-toms and *ratiers* were still mournfully beating and squealing, evidently accompanying some weird native dance. But I went off to sleep again in spite of them.

We were early about in the morning, anxious to see as much of the oasis as possible. We started off on foot with the hotel guide, who led us first through the *soûk*, and then pointed out the sacred mosque. He spoke very good English, and I questioned him as to the possibility of our entering the mosque, scarcely expecting that "infidels," and one of them a female at that, would be accorded this privilege. But the guide did not seem to think the suggestion outrageous, and said he would consult the *Imam*. He went away and returned in a few moments with the priest, who was carrying two enormous keys, with one of which he opened the great iron doors of the mosque. The *Imam* invited us to follow; seeing him remove his sandals, we took the hint and, doing likewise, entered! The interior was very

bare, with rush matting on the floor, and no furniture save three or four grandfather clocks and an ancient oak chest. Several chandeliers with a goodly array of what I believe used to be called "lustres" completed the equipment. The priest seemed quite willing that we should see all we wanted to, and waited patiently while we examined everything—which didn't take long. After we had put some money in the alms box and indicated our readiness, he led us out of the mosque, and opened a second door with the other great key. Preceded by our guide—the *Imam* stayed below—we ascended the minaret up one of the most extraordinary spiral staircases I have ever seen.

Those who have visited the East—or those who have seen pictures, for that matter—will remember that the tower is a fairly slender affair at the best of times, but this one must have been unusually narrow, I think. The staircase, anyway, was just about as narrow as it could be and still be of any use. I am not exactly burly, and even my shoulders, as they swayed in ascending, touched both walls at times. But worse still was the tiny radius of the spiral. Except for the necessity for climbing step by step, it was almost like spinning round on one's heel. And the place was in absolute inky darkness. After climbing for thousands of years up millions of steps, a faint light appeared. It was the half-way house—thank goodness!—leading out on to the roof of the mosque, whence in this case the *muezzin* calls the faithful to prayer. I am not going to pretend that I studied these people, because it must be very obvious that time never permitted of more than the most casual observations. But I was very much impressed by their devotion to their religion, and particularly with the complete absence of self-consciousness with which they observe the formulæ of their faith, no matter where they may be when the appointed hours arrive.

From this landing the guide beckoned us to follow him still farther up the narrow stair; and the view from the top was worth the uncanny climb. In the midst of the vast expanse of desert, the luxuriant foliage of the palms—30,000 of them, I was told—of this beautiful oasis partially screens the dazzling domes and flat-roofed houses. Unfortunately we were not able to see a typical Saharan sunset at Laghouat, though I heard that the fierce, nearly horizontal rays of the evening sun changing slowly to molten gold before the green flash and abrupt cessation of light which is typical of the whole region is a wonderful sight. But in the clean, limpid morning light, the scene was almost overpoweringly beautiful—in the extreme contrast with the monotone of the desert, which is one of Nature's delightful little tricks, and the despair of the painter to reproduce. I have some small pretensions in this direction myself, and I couldn't help remarking to my husband that if I were to put on canvas an absolutely faithful representation of the scene which dazzled and delighted us, no one would believe that the depth of colouring was not grossly exaggerated.

However, we had yet to descend the minaret, and if the going up had been difficult, the return was really rather dreadful. We had to make continual stops, sitting on the stairs, to rest from the continual whirling round and round of the dark spiral, and long before we got to the half-way landing it had made me feel quite giddy and faint. The guide did not seem at all surprised, so I suppose it affects everyone the same way; and he advised me to take my time in recovering before tackling the second half of the descent.

At the foot we found the *Imam* awaiting our return, and after many thanks for his kindness we returned to the hotel in hot haste to be off on the next stage of the journey to Bou Saâda, about as far to the north-east of Djelfa as Laghouat is to the south-west.

CHAPTER TEN

In which we fear that we are lost in the desert; and later fail to appreciate the antics of dancing girls of the Ouled Naïl tribe.

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

"THE TRACK WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH FROM THE LOOSE SAND OF THE DESERT"

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CHAPTER TEN

For the first part of the journey from Laghouat to Bou Saâda we had to retrace our wheel tracks of the previous night to Djelfa, the capital of the Ouled Naïl tribe, which produces the famous dancing girls, and were able to realize from the altitude—nearly 4,000 feet, I believe—of that little town the reason why it had seemed so terribly cold. Also, with a shudder and extreme care I negotiated the bend upon which we had nearly come to grief in the opposite direction.

Looking back, we are able to realize the foolish and dangerous risk we ran in lightly embarking on the cross-desert run from Djelfa; but we did not know until afterwards that the French authorities insist that cars shall not travel singly on this track, on account of the impossibility of obtaining succour in the case of accident. The track was very difficult to distinguish from the loose sand of the desert, and for hours we saw no sign of a living thing—man, bird or beast.

Suddenly on the horizon appeared a number of black specks, which on closer approach resolved themselves into a miniature army of humans and camels and herds —a tribe on the march to the mountains, I imagine, since this is the annual custom at about that time of year with certain tribes. It was a remarkable sight, and one upon which I suppose we were very lucky to happen. Whole families were piled up on camels, complete with luggage, and quantities of baby camels

trotted alongside. The faces of some of the women were weirdly painted in the same manner as were those of the roadmakers we had seen at the foot of the Atlas de Blîdah mountains on the previous day.

The atmosphere on this particular day was rather peculiar. The sun was blazing down, and yet the wind was piercing, and it was almost impossible to get just the right degree of warmth and ventilation in the interior of our little saloon. We tried every conceivable variation of window opening, but every moment the outside conditions seemed to change until, as the sun got lower in the west, we were able to shut ourselves in for good. There was no guide as to where we were; but just as the sun was about to disappear my husband worked out time and distance, the latter as shown by the speed indicator, and found that we should still have about twenty miles to go to reach Bou Saâda. The difficulty of distinguishing the track was even greater than on the previous night, and as time went on and there was no sign of town or camp or human habitation we began to get anxious. By now we had a better appreciation of the seriousness of getting lost in the desert, for it would be only by a miracle that we should see anyone to help us, and we were totally unprepared in the matter of either fuel or food—the last piece of chocolate having been consumed hours before—to spend a night in the open. Still the miles rolled back until we should have been far past Bou Saâda, according to our reckoning. Pulling up, we studied the map to see if by any possibility we could have missed a turning. Apparently there was no side turning, but it was always on the cards that a track of insufficient importance to be shown might exist. That was what we feared, of course, but there seemed nothing to do but carry on, since we certainly couldn't turn round and go back to look for a turning which might not be there! My

husband said that we simply must be right on top of the town, so off we went again. He was right, for, rounding a slight bend between the sand-dunes, we came with reassuring suddenness upon the lights which spelled salvation.

Bou Saâda, we had been told, is famous for its dancing girls, although actually Djelfa is the head-quarters of the tribe; and as it was only about seven o'clock and we were much less fatigued than usual at the end of our day, we decided to see what the Ouled Naïls could do. But here we found no lock-up garage, so we had to go through the process of putting our car to bed in its bag, which caused much amazement among the natives. After a hasty dinner, therefore, we went off with the hotel guide to a place of entertainment. This turned out to be an ordinary Arab dwelling, in a large chamber of which the walls were hung with tapestry and lined with benches, apparently for the audience. The town being much nearer the coast, and consequently more easily within the reach of tourists, there was not quite the same spontaneous atmosphere that we imagined would have prevailed at a similar function in Laghouat or Djelfa; and judging from what we had to pay for our seats the organizers, if not the girls themselves, reap a rich harvest from their entertainment. We sat down forlornly, the only auditors; we waited; and we waited some more! At last a burst of what sounded like heated argument in Arabic came from an adjoining room, several female voices providing a shrill accompaniment for a very manly bass. Then three women—mother and daughters, apparently—came in, still arguing, followed by a huge man with a small drum. Still they couldn't get on with the job, for he had a lot of difficulty in tightening up the instrument in front of a charcoal brazier. All this business, our guide told us, was quite usual, so I suppose the discussion was not

so acrimonious as it sounded. But at last the elder of the two girls, both of whom were quite good looking even from our standards, stepped forward and commenced her dance. It was all very monotonous, and the less said about the music the better. We would gladly have gone, but as we were alone, fear of causing offence kept us stuck to our seats. This went on for about half an hour, when two French tourists entered—and, instead of being able to get away we had to watch, and, still worse, listen to, a repetition of the performance. I consoled myself by studying the extraordinary grimaces and squeals with which the mother encouraged her offspring—evidently it was an Eastern form of applause or something—who appeared perfectly indifferent to the opinion of the older woman or of anyone else as to their performance. After this had gone on for an interminable time, and I had long tired of my little amusement, as a sort of grand finale they performed what they called in English " a family dance." This was an even more extraordinary affair, the performers singing in high-pitched voices on two or three notes and making all sorts of meaningless gestures. Suddenly the whole thing ended most abruptly, and the " star " came forward and shook hands with all of us, saying, in broken English, " How do you do." The guide whispered that we should give her a hundred francs, which we did, returning to the hotel thereafter feeling that we had wasted both time and money.

As a sort of consolation, for he could see that we were disappointed, the guide suggested camel rides in the morning. We agreed, ordering two, for my husband very wisely preferred terra firma and the operating handle of his Baby Cine. " And so," as Mr. Pepys says, " to bed."

Our camels were awaiting us when we first appeared on the veranda of our bedroom in the morning, and I

noted at once that one of them was a most vicious-looking beast, which was continually " bleating " in a most unpleasant fashion. I immediately decided that this was not going to be mine—very wisely, as it turned out, for no sooner had the brute knelt and his prospective rider come into range than the latter nearly lost a large slice of calf! My camel was quite a decently behaved beast, and seemed to appreciate the honour I was bestowing upon it.

" Can they jump? " I asked, forgetting that I was not upon my old horse, Dinkie, and looking for a nice, easy fence—in the desert!—to try him out.

" You go easy," my fellow camelteer advised. " When once they start they don't stop for three days! If you want to go to Timbuktu, give him his head! "

I certainly was all at sea on that " ship of the desert," and was quite lost without the usual bridle and hunting crop. But the little Cine was now busy, and I was much amused to see my husband trying to take " stills " with a camera in one hand and turn the handle of the " movie " with the other. He motioned to me to get the camels in line with the car, so that it could be included in the pictures, but the animals apparently took a dislike to the colour scheme of our primrose-and-blue saloon, and they weren't having any! When sufficient pictures had been taken, the two of us set off for a ride, but after the first two minutes I quite changed my mind about the joys of a long camel tour, and I think we were both glad to bring the occasion to a sudden end.

Since by this time it was nearly ten o'clock, and about 150 miles of strange roads separated us from our destination—Algiers—we went straight round to the garage to get the car, and started off as soon as we had got the luggage safely on board. The journey back this way is rather flat and uninteresting for the first twenty miles. But at about this point we encountered a desert camp

at which market-day was in full swing. Horses and donkeys were for sale, and everybody appeared to be most remarkably busy except for one dignified figure on a beautiful white Arab steed who was calmly looking on. The *Kaid,* for such he must have been, and so, at any rate, I am determined to regard him, made a splendid picture, and I had to have a photograph of him.

Pulling up the car, I got out and tried to explain to him what was wanted, at the same time fondling his horse. But he seemed extremely shy, and I did not like to make him turn his face towards the camera. My husband therefore only got a back view; and so soon as I let go of the bridle this ultra-modest *Kaid* galloped off into the desert—relieved to have escaped kidnapping by an Englishwoman, I suppose!

Thereafter the road was very winding but of good surface all the way back to Algiers, and the climb over the mountains was much easier than on our outward trip by way of Blîdah and Boghari. It was about an hour before sunset when we arrived, and, as on our first acquaintance with the town, we found driving through the streets no easy matter. The traffic is very active, and especially the trams, which have, I was told, a happy habit of charging you at full tilt if you trespass for many seconds on their preserves. Here I had an argument with a *gendarme,* who, so far as I could gather, accused me of doing everything that was wrong and nothing that was right. But I find the best policy on such occasions is to assume an air of absolute stupidity, and a complete lack of understanding of the French language! One is then waved on impatiently, to save further delay of the traffic.

This plan worked as usual, and we ascended the winding hill on our return to the Hôtel St. George—which I forgot to mention was one of the most

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

THE ABDUCTION OF THE SHEIK

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luxurious we had yet stayed in, with beautiful gardens of palms, cacti and other specimen plants which are kept cool and green by the constant use of the hose. A ball was in progress when we arrived, and we happened to meet some English friends at dinner that night. They intended to visit Bou Saâda on the following day, but later we learnt that their car had come off second best in a tussle with a tram somewhere near the spot at which I had impressed the *gendarme* so favourably with my driving skill and intelligence!

We were very tempted to join the dancers, but as the morrow would see us tackling the second of our efforts to get ahead of, or make up, time by running straight through over the 260 miles to Oran, instead of staying a night at Tenes, we decided not to risk it. A late night meant either a late start in the morning or beginning the long run unrefreshed, and as the trip to the desert had put us actually behind our schedule we made the best of a bad job and went to bed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

In which we encounter a strange coincidence on an Algerian mountain road, and, in learning that Southern Italy is not the only place where bad roads exist, break a spring.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BEFORE starting in the morning we thought it wise to pay a visit to the manager of a certain garage in Algiers to whom we had been recommended, with a particular view to obtaining information concerning the Moorish portion of our trip. In our original schedule, on the advice of the club officials at home, Casablanca was named as our port of departure for Europe, but knowing that the still disturbed Riff country lay somewhere across in that direction we thought it wise to obtain first-hand information if possible. We found our friend—an Englishman, by the way—very anxious to help; but his comment when we outlined our proposed route to him was:

"But why sail from Casablanca, when the crossing from Tangier to Gibraltar is so much shorter?"

I pricked up my ears! Anything to dodge an extra five minutes at sea! Getting the maps out, we studied the lie of the country more closely, and saw the force of his remark. The Riff country, he explained, certainly does lie between Casablanca and Tangier, though rather away to the east, and while the road northward through Rabat to Tangier did actually run through the borders of the dangerous district, it was adequately patrolled in day-time, though at night traffic was not permitted. This would be in the zone of Spanish control, of course; and as in any case we had to go to Casablanca for letters, apart from the fact that there is

no practicable road leading direct from Fez to Tangier through the heart of the Riff country, we decided that the idea was worth thinking about.

What really decided us, I think, was the discovery that the Casablanca boat actually touches at Tangier, so that if we picked it up at the latter port the saving of many hours of sea passage was all the more strongly emphasized. And in any case, still more up-to-date information as to the alleged disturbance in that part of Morocco could be obtained when we had actually entered the country, which we hoped to do in a couple of days.

We had some regrets in saying farewell to the fine and semi-European capital of Algeria, ringed about by the exquisite Sahel hills, with its gems of mediæval architecture rubbing shoulders with the most modern of commercial buildings, and its amazing *Kasbah*, standing high above the present city.

In that survival of the barbarous ages can be found scenes as strange as any which later we found at Fez —mysterious lanes leading to what destination one scarcely dares to investigate; variegated crowds of dealers, beggars, grave-eyed children and veiled women; ancient gabled houses almost touching across the street overhead, and the astounding mixture of the sublime with the sordid which only the East can furnish.

But we had to go, having already put ourselves behind our schedule through the trip to the desert, and looked to this day's run direct to Oran, instead of stopping overnight at Tenes, to get us square. The way out was easy to find, since it lay over the hill and straight on the road to Blîdah, where we had missed the turning for Laghouat some days earlier. On this occasion, however, the road which then had been wrong became right, and I rather dreaded having to retraverse that dreadful surface. But it had to be

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

"WE CLEARED THE ROAD SO FAR AS WE WERE ABLE"

Photo by Hon V. A. Bruce

MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDIES OF THE ROAD

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done, and proceeding very, very cautiously we passed the same shy road-mending men and less shy women, the same queer roadside huts, and the same pot-holes, bumps and loose stones. Our idea when we went wrong at this point that the Atlas Mountains were disappearing on our left proved to be an illusion, because on this day we had to cross that same range in which is situated the wonderful Gorge de la Chiffa. The Atlas de Blîdah Mountains were much less interesting on this road, but were quite pretty in their own way, and the road was wide and easily graded.

But shortly we came upon the evidences of a tragedy. Right in the middle of the road were the mudguards and odd pieces of a burnt-out motor-car which had been pushed to the side, with its remnants of bonnet slung into the ditch. It must have been a terrible crash, for the car had overturned before catching fire, as could be seen by the bent steering wheel and other signs, while the tyres, though not burnt, were literally torn to ribbons. Everything else had been consumed by the flames, and the heat had been so fierce that much of the aluminium work of the engine had been melted. The car was a racing Bugatti. We never learned what had been the cause or result of the accident; but we presumed that it must have been of recent occurrence, since no one had yet had time to remove the traces from the road, where, at night time, they would certainly have been highly dangerous to other traffic. We cleared the road so far as we were able and hurried on in somewhat chastened spirits, having also photographed the remarkable scene. To our astonishment, scarcely 100 yards farther on we came upon the remains of another motor-car, in somewhat similar circumstances! This amused us, rather than otherwise. We wondered whether it was a coincidence, or an epidemic! But personally I was a little worried, as things always happen

to me " in threes," and not only did I not want to run into the third broken car unexpectedly round one of the many corners, but had no particular desire for our own to be that " third." So I went on with considerable caution. This was necessary, anyway, as the road was highly dangerous, with many hairpins and precipices which were not comfortable to look at or think about. Still, we had got used to this kind of thing by then, and the yawning chasm didn't exist which could give us a real thrill. We had driven through Italy!

Orleansville seemed a likely place for lunch, and after a little searching we found a nice little restaurant where we obtained a pleasantly European meal.

We had been advised to cut out Oran from our itinerary altogether. But apart from the fact that we didn't care about unnecessarily departing from original intentions, we were practically forced to touch Oran on account of its being on our schedule—mine, as well as that of our observer—for letters. So there we were, and as the road had been quite passable up to then, I began pessimistically to feel that every moment brought us near to the dangerous part of which we had been warned.

But the road continued fair to Relizane, where the appearance of the country became most remarkably English, and if it had not been for the occasional native, we might almost have been back on Salisbury Plain. Reaching Mascara at tea-time, we thought that we might get a reasonably decent cup of the beverage which cheers.

After some little time spent in looking for a café where our longings could be satisfied, we were beginning to give it up as hopeless when a Frenchman came up to us—having been a spectator of our wanderings, I suppose—and very pleasantly asked if he could help us. This friend in need piloted us to the only place where tea could possibly be obtained, and in reply

to our questions about the state of the road to Oran confirmed what we had been told already. The road was very treacherous, he said, and we must beware.

" You cannot be too careful, or you will break your car," he told us. " You will find good stretches of road, and then suddenly will arrive at unrepaired patches, with pot-holes a foot deep ! "

We thanked him, and entered the sweet shop to which we had been led. The little Frenchwoman who kept it prepared quite a good pot of tea, for which I was very grateful. Then one of us wanted cigarettes, and to our amazement the proprietress called an absolute infant (of two years, she told us afterwards) and sent it out on the errand. We couldn't help expressing surprise at seeing such a tiny mite sent out alone into the streets in this way, but her mother said :

" Oh, she knows what she is about ! She does nearly all my shopping for me ! "

I had got used to the precosity of the Arab kiddies of very tender years, and the maturity of others scarcely in their 'teens, but I should think that for a European child this little marketer of Mascara must establish a world record ! Anyway, in less than five minutes back she came with the cigarettes.

We stayed at Mascara until the sun had set, because, as I think I have remarked before, driving westwards into the eye of the setting sun is very trying. But the necessity for driving in the dark was rather unfortunate in this case, since now we knew for certain that there was something really bad in the way of road surfaces ahead of us. However, what is to be will be ! You can't help getting fatalistic in your outlook in Africa.

Almost at once we came upon verification of our various warnings. A good stretch of road would be followed without the slightest indication of its presence by positively vile surface, and as time went on the bad

patches became worse and worse. At last we seemed to have run out of the danger zone, and for nearly ten miles the " intermittency " seemed to have disappeared. Gradually gaining confidence, I let the " speedo." needle creep round the dial. But suddenly, right in front of me, loomed a railway line running across the road, standing at least a foot high. There was no time to slow down to less than forty miles an hour, and we hit the obstruction with a terrific crash. Everyone left their seats, including myself; it's a wonder no one was injured in banging against the solid supports of the roof. And then there was a horrible grinding noise, which suggested that the very least we could dare to expect was a broken chassis.

" That's done it," I cried. " Something must have gone this time. Shall I stop? "

My husband told me to carry on, since the car continued to run, and anyway, whatever we found, nothing in the way of a repair could be done at that spot. Anticipating our subsequent examination of the car, I will say now that we found two leaves of the off-side front spring broken—and I consider the fates let us down very lightly!

In the meantime, I drove on very cautiously, and for more than forty miles I am sure we never exceeded ten miles an hour. Even if there had been no doubt as to the soundness of the car, and I had not had such a shock, the condition of the road thereafter would have rendered any greater speed impossible. That last section was agonizing, because beneath our mere discomfort was the terrible anxiety as to what had happened to the motor-car, and whether we should find it impossible to finish our tour. I don't think a single one of us felt any personal anxiety, although after such a crash, followed by the wracking of the continuously bad road, almost anything might have happened at any moment.

I know that all I thought about was whether anything serious had happened, and, if so, whether we should be able to put it right and carry on.

It was half-past ten when eventually our lame duck crawled into Oran, and I don't suppose we had ever been more glad to reach our destination. But everything was wrong that evening. We started off by mistaking the railway station for the hotel; then, when we had discovered the hotel (the cheapest of any at which we had stayed since leaving Monte Carlo, and by no means the least comfortable) the pilot who undertook to lead us to the garage seemed not to be aware that road repairing operations were in progress. Into street after street he took us, only to find that the road was "up," and I had to back out again. This sort of thing, coming at the end of such a trying run, would make most people irritable, I should think, but I had really got past it, and just did what I was told without a murmur! Rather unusual for me!

Returning to the hotel, none of us felt in the humour for food, and on the hall porter's promise to bring us glasses of hot milk we trooped off to bed. And that was Oran, to which I had looked forward so much, with its violent contrasts of bustling European commercial activity and its quaint native and Jewish quarters; Oran, built as an amphitheatre on two sides of a ravine, retaining its atmosphere, yet affording a handsome tribute to French colonization.

CHAPTER TWELVE

In which we enter Morocco, and after a fine run over the Imperial Way, are stricken with awe by a distant view of Fez.

CHAPTER TWELVE

For once in a way we were able to make an early start without wandering, possibly for an hour or more, around the town looking for the post office, for in Oran, wonderful to relate, this much-sought institution proved to be in the same square as that in which our own hotel was situated. So, the preliminaries soon over, we set off on what, if we could complete it, would probably prove our longest day's journey. We hoped to make Fez, 346 miles away, that night; failing this, we had the alternative of breaking the journey at Taza, which was only—"only," mark you!—271 miles from Oran. The following day being Sunday, our "day off," whether we wanted it or not, we naturally desired to get to an interesting place, in order to be able to spend the day in profitable sightseeing. And of Fez and its wonders we had heard so much that we were all impatient to get there.

Knowing that Oran lay in the middle of that wretched stretch of road, the first half of which we had so painfully negotiated in the dark the night before, we were prepared for a continuance of bad conditions for the first few miles. But all the way to Tlemcen, through Aïn Temouchent, the surface was the worst imaginable, and I am not exaggerating in the slightest degree when I say that driving was simply a matter of keeping the car's speed down to the slowest pace at which it would continue to move at all—three miles an hour, I should

imagine, but certainly a very slow walking-pace. The dodging of enormous pot-holes took all my attention over this stage, so I am not ashamed to admit that I haven't the faintest recollection of the scenery, though I do remember that for many miles the road ran alongside the Sebkra d'Oran, or Lake of Oran—but it was very flat and except for this inland sea the country was uninteresting. But Tlemcen impressed me by its peacefulness. The foliage, the sparkling streams and occasional waterfalls, and the beautiful surroundings seemed to put the little town far beyond mere human jealousies and strife, and I could well appreciate the frame of mind of the Moslem saint, who is reputed to have said of Tlemcen : " It is a beautiful spot in which to spend Eternity."

Nothing exciting occurred until at Lalla Marnia we reached the end of the Algerian part of our tour, and entered mysterious Morocco, the last of the North African states to succumb to Northern control, and even yet holding out against the suppression of individuality which is more or less evident in most of the parts through which we had come. The business of passing out of Algeria into Morocco was transacted with amazing celerity and efficiency. The *douane* was a properly organized affair, with benches for the examination of luggage, such as one would find at Boulogne or any other " civilized " French port, and very different from the tumble-down huts to which we had recently become accustomed. With our *carnet* correctly stamped, we were soon free to make off into the *Moghreb*, of which Oudjda, nearby, was the first town. Though only a frontier city, Oudjda has yet escaped the hands of the vandal, and remains in all essentials purely Moroccan, with the crenellated walls upon which, we were told, the heads of captured enemies were exposed up to a very short time ago.

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

FINE METHOD OF SIGNPOSTING EMPLOYED IN MOROCCO

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On leaving Oudjda we were glad to find that from a mere track, the road, known as the *Trik es Soltan*, became indeed an "Imperial Way." That for nearly a hundred miles there was not a single thing of interest to be seen did not worry me, for at last it was possible to get along at a pace which gave more promise of reaching Taza, if not Fez, that night; and incidentally haste was necessary, since we had been warned that in the military zone which we were now entering traffic was not permitted on the road after nightfall, while it was about two o'clock in the afternoon before we crossed the frontier. The country reminded me of a sort of glorified Salisbury Plain more than anything else. There were no houses, and no trees, nothing but bare open country. The road was dead straight and gently undulating, and there was nothing to do but push along at our best speed, or something very near it.

At this part we came upon the first of a series of wonderful signposts. They were of clean, white stone some ten feet high, with lettering of quite a foot and a half, which can easily be read at speed from a distance of two hundred yards. At each fork or road crossing the directions are unmistakably displayed, and though here and there we discovered discrepancies in the kilometre markings, it was impossible to lose the way. It was somewhat surprising, in view of the almost ideal nature of this wonderful "motor road"—built for a very much less peaceable purpose, by the way—that in all the miles between Oudjda and Taza we saw but three other motor-cars. It is the only road running right across Morocco, from Oudjda to Casablanca, and accompanying it all the way is the one and only railway, a narrow-gauge line.

One could imagine that there would be little traffic

in the rainy season, as a peculiarity of the road is the absence of bridges. Where it is necessary to cross a river bed, the road slopes sharply down to nearly the normal water-level, and then continues across the stream upon a low concrete causeway, through the arches of which the water runs. This applies to the stream in its shrunken summer state; when it is swollen to a raging torrent by the rains, the water rushes over the top of the causeway, and the road "goes west" until the floods subside. When I saw the first of these causeways I understood what really happened to my husband's principal competitor in the Monte Carlo Rally of 1926. He had started for the Riviera from Tunis—following much the same route as that of our own tour—and had an advantage over my husband in that he would get a greater number of marks for the longer distance. But when, on arriving at Monte Carlo, we heard that our rival had "gone into a river," we knew that the prize must be ours. It was somewhere along this road that his mishap occurred; finding, in January, that a river was rushing over the causeway, he must have attempted to cross. The water, however, was too deep; it got into his engine, and put him out of the running.

It was quite dark by the time we reached Taza, and we were not altogether surprised to be held up by armed guards, who demanded the production of our papers. Whether or not we should have been allowed to proceed I do not know, because we had reconciled ourselves to the idea that the remaining seventy odd miles to Fez were out of the question until after we had rested. So, without questioning the guards, we made straight for the hotel, which we found full of French officers. But Taza the Mysterious, as it is called, has always been a great military centre, even before the coming of the French, since it is the key to a defile

for the possession of which blood has been shed throughout the ages.

Taza the Drear, I should call it; and in the morning it did not take us many moments to discover why we had been advised not to think of stopping in this melancholy place. The same enormous mud walls which later we found to be a feature of fortified Moorish cities—and every town of any consequence in the *Moghreb* is necessarily fortified—gave an air of gloom to Taza; the streets which in Fez are picturesque, even though sometimes forbidding, are merely sordid in this battle-scarred town, and even the walls are showing the strain of their task throughout the centuries, and are gradually powdering back into the earth from which they were built.

An hour spent in wandering about this depressing place showed us that we should be well-advised to leave it as quickly as possible, and since our observer was as keen as we were to get to Fez, we once more compromised and did the short journey on the forbidden day.

There is very little to tell of the last stage of the journey. The road maintained its character for the greater part of the way, but at last, as we knew from the "speedo." that we must be approaching the capital, a low range of hills interposed themselves in our path. Winding up and up, suddenly, and almost without warning, a complete panorama of the city presented itself to our eager gaze. We pulled the car up, and looked our fill. It was indeed the most wonderful sight that our tour of Northern Africa, crowded with interest though it had been, had yet produced. While we were still too far away to make out details, except of the larger objects—the massive, loopholed walls, for instance, dominated the scene—the city presented the appearance of a gigantic patch-

work of delicate colours, the green roofs of the holy places (as we afterwards discovered) and the blue tiling of the minarets blending imperceptibly with the varied green tints of palms and cypresses, with here and there a contrasting gleam of white terrace and palace.

How long we remained on the hill-top gazing in fascination upon this remarkable picture of Fez from the air I do not know; but looking down upon the gleaming town with its crown of verdure and protective circlet of mountains we could not restrain exclamations of delight. Fez—in the distance—is like a beautiful jewel in a glorious setting; nearer-to, I thought, it would probably lose some of its ethereal charm, but actually, when the time came, I found that growing mystery amply compensated for the loss as one approached the walls.

But I have so much to say of Fez that I am sure it will take a whole chapter to itself.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

In which I sleep in a Sultana's bedroom, and stroll in the Garden of Delights by moonlight.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FEZ—*Fès l'Inviolée* at last! Somehow I felt that every incident in our tour had been merely leading up to this climax—our arrival at the *Moghreb* capital. The very name has an atmosphere of romance, while the kaleidoscopic history of the city, learnt on the spot, emphasizes the unchanging charm of Fez.

It is written:

O passant! arrête-toi et réfléchis!
Admire ces beautés et cette merveille accomplie
Et alors dis-toi:
" Le mystère est dans les habitants
Et non dans l'édifice."

Perhaps it is so; but there is at least an atmosphere which is of the place, and of the people only by unconscious association. Its narrow, tortuous streets are eloquent of the intrigue which is so marked a characteristic of Eastern diplomacy—and of Western too, maybe, but in different fashion. And its scents seem to carry forward into the present and future that Past of Fez which is so fascinating.

Fez the Inviolate! Never was there a more appropriate description. Nothing has changed; nothing can change. There is an air of peace, and, as one writer has it, of " almost religious mystery; a voluptuous calm perfumed by orange trees and flowers, and the penetrat-

ing aroma of roses and jasmin. What quietude, what security! In hours of discouragement or weariness, delicious refuge!"

So far as mere words may, that very nearly expresses my own emotions. But there are many sides to Fez. Fighting for supremacy in my recollections are the significantly high and solid walls of the city—noble in the distance, but crumbling and peeling as though attacked by disease on closer acquaintance; the clamant and noisome beggars; the blind, windowless, repellent houses; the dark clefts through the masonry which are the main streets of Fez—and, in contrast, a radiant sun in a turquoise sky, playing gaily on the clear water of the fountains in the terrace gardens of the Palais Jamaï.

Of that Palace, once the stronghold of the most puissant Grand Vizier, Mohammed Ben el Arbi el Jamaï, the real ruler of Morocco; once the refuge of the Sultan Moulai Abderrahman, and now a unit in the chain of Transatlantique hotels, I have much to say. But in the meantime we are still palpitating with wonderment on the high hill which dominates the city.

At the foot of the hill, making for the nearest *porte*, the desire of the tourist to find a good hotel was apparent to the crowd of Moorish children who were playing in the gateway. A dozen smiling mites—boys, for all the pure beauty of their sparkling, brown faces—scrambled on to our running boards, eager to be chosen as guide. We picked the most intelligent looking, and were piloted back up the hill which he had just descended for a certain distance, when, making a detour, we skirted the city wall for nearly three miles. Just as I was coming to the conclusion that our pilot had not properly understood what we wanted, and was leading us astray, we reached the northern gate and were greeted by an adult guide. This man spoke quite good English, and on learning our requirements told us we would not be able

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

A LONELY DESERT TRACK

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

THE HIGH AND SOLID WALLS OF FEZ

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to take the car inside the walls on account of the narrowness of the streets. In our inexperience we insisted that our motor-car was neat and small enough to go anywhere.

With a shrug of the shoulders, he beckoned to us to follow him through the gate, around which squatted the inevitable swarm of abjectly miserable beggars. The gloom of this *porte* in the thickness of the wall gave me the impression of entering a cavern; and this was little changed when eventually we emerged into the " street " beyond. Scarcely more than the car's width to start with, the roadway narrowed gradually, until the converging tops of the buildings on either side shut out all but a narrow strip of sky—of deeper tint by contrast with the leprous plaster, not quite decently disguised in sombre shadow, of the walls below. And then came a corner, a still narrower carriage-way, another bend round which I had to manœuvre the car with repeated " tacks."

I felt sure we were getting lost in the *soûk*—this couldn't be Main Street, Fez! But, with the wings almost touching the houses on either side, we forged on foot by foot, rounding corner after corner, until at last light, air and elbow room were reached in a big square in front of the Palais Jamaï. But this magnificent structure surely could not be an hotel! Terraced, crenellated, of no identifiable style of architecture, it appeared a stronghold, a truly regal fortress—as indeed, it once was. But our guide reassured us, and indicated a roofed enclosure which would serve as garage for the car. Then he led us through a narrow passage and up a short flight of steps to the *Grande Terrasse*, a noble expanse of garden with beautiful mosaic tiling, a central fountain, and small tables each shielded from the too-friendly sun by gigantic orange-tinted umbrellas. Up and down inconsequent stairways, through a labyrinth

of palms and glorious greenery, we wandered on until the bureau was found and the mundane task of registering accomplished.

When the hotel people learnt that we had actually driven to the door of the Palais Jamaï, and that our motor-car was reposing in the "garage," they were almost incredulous, as it appears that only one car, and that a tiny two-seater, has ever been seen in the interior of the city of Fez. The usual practice is to park the car outside the walls—and I don't wonder! It was just possible to drive to the hotel, and that is all. And if, having got part way through the narrow streets, we had unfortunately got stuck at a corner which was just that little less than possible, it would have been a hopeless task to have reversed out of the city again. Where ignorance is bliss . . . but if I had known what was before me I certainly should not have attempted the difficult passage.

However, there we were, safe and sound, and the objects of a nine-days' wonder. I dare say they only thought to themselves, "The mad English again!" but they made a very gratifying fuss of us, all the same.

We were told the history of the palace—how El Arbi Jamaï, the most influential noble of the Ouled-Jamaï, was honoured by the Sultan Moulai Abderrahman, whose favourite son took unto himself to wife the daughter of El Jamaï. Need I say that legend reputes her to have been "beautiful as a sunbeam"? And do not the requirements of romance join with those of fact in giving to her the succession to the throne on the death of her father? Anyway, it was so; and, though I am not going to pretend that I remember all of the fascinating "Arabian Nights" story of love and intrigue which I was told, it does stay in my memory that I was able to sleep in the Sultana's bedroom.

Photo by Hon. V. [illegible] Bruce

LOOKING DOWN UPON THE GARDEN OF THE HAREM

Photo by Hon. V. [illegible]

THE PLACE OF THE BATHING POOL

This, as I have said before, is a personal story, and not a guide-book!

In our tour of the wonderful Palais, we were led from the discreet shadows of the terrace gardens through a beautiful gateway into a still more secluded place—balconied and paved with marble; surrounded by walls pierced by many doorways, and with a magnificent bathing-pool. I did not at first realize that we were in the harem, and that the most magnificent doorway of all led into the veritable chamber of the Sultana! Our guide pointed out the rooms allotted to our party, and, largely in fun, I expressed a wish that we could have had the Sultana's bedroom.

"Ah! but it is very expensive," was the reply. "Besides, it is usually booked for many weeks ahead."

It had not really occurred to me that this wonderful room was now—sad fate!—merely an hotel bedroom; but on giving a promise to vacate it the following day I was permitted to call it my own for the one night. Inside the massive door the room was a dream of delight; the wonderful walls and ceilings and the seductive splendour of the place enthralled me. Among the treasures we were shown was a fine old chest of unnamed antiquity and, behind doors beautifully inlaid with gold and mother-o'-pearl, a cupboard in which the Sultana had kept her jewels—and into which I irreverently shoved my one and only chapeau!

Outside we examined anew the Place of the Bathing Pool and garden of the harem. We looked into the little rooms which surrounded it—the less expensive bedrooms of the hotel now, though once the chambers of long-forgotten favourites; and noted the heavily barred and significantly tiny windows. Up above the still smaller rooms of the slaves reminded us of the tiered openings of a gigantic dovecot—but the "doves"

are all flown, and I don't know what these little rooms are used for now.

We next made our way to the Vizier's own quarters. Here the magnificence was even more overpowering, and the wall and ceiling paintings real works of art. A narrow marble staircase took us up to the ramparts, where we spent a long time admiring the wonderful view over the enchanted city. As always, mosques of all sizes dominated the scene, the graceful minarets pointing their delicate fingers to heaven high above the merely mundane buildings of the city.

But the hours were passing, and we still had to make an excursion actually into the town—I should have been heart-broken if even the fascination of that aerial view had made us miss the *soûk*, for which I had acquired a taste in Tunis. Obtaining a guide—Abdullah ben Hamed, a name which seemed peculiarly in keeping with the unspoiled Eastern atmosphere—we ventured into a similar passage to that by which we had arrived at the Palais Jamaï, and in fifty yards or so reached the bazaar. Here we saw all manner of strange sights; and admired the beautiful leather work for which the craftsmen of Fez are famous.

It was all wonderful—and yet rather awful, for poverty and disease thrust themselves upon one's notice everywhere. Blindness, even in tiny children, appears to be a matter of little moment, but when we saw the dreadful conditions in which even the moderately-prosperous lived, nothing could be wondered at. The houses were usually mere holes in the wall; donkeys, children and adults shared sleeping accommodation. Beggars, halt and lame and awful to look upon, squatted all about, thrusting out repulsive paws for the alms which they seemed neither grateful to receive nor disappointed not to get. I wondered if stolidity, fatalism, or an advanced stage of incurable despair accounted for the

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

OUTSIDE THE SULTANA'S BEDROOM

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passionless attitude of these beggars. And again we saw little children labouring in the gloom of evil-smelling hovels, at nine o'clock at night, to produce that splendid leathern work. I couldn't bargain ever again with these poor people for the fruits of their labour, and the pitiful dignity of one worker who patiently explained to me the hours of careful, expert workmanship involved in the production of an article for which I lightly offered half of what he asked, will always haunt me.

But don't let's get depressed! We will leave the *soûk* and its queer contrast of degraded misery and entrancing novelty. My next recollection of Fez is an hour or so later, when, after dinner, we strolled in the glamour of moonlight in the gardens of the Palais Jamaï. The pile, jumbled haphazard like the illustration of a fairy tale, and yet symbolic of force and security, was etherealized in the white radiance. The Garden of the Sultana—"*joli jardin d'Islam*"—"*Jardin des Delices*"—words, lines and phrases which I had heard and read during the day sprang to my mind, and seeing the brilliant contrast of the almost blinding moonlight and the heavy shadows cast by the luxuriant foliage I recalled, in particular, one remark:

"*L'on s'attend à voir, sous quelque ombrage discrèt, deux amants oubliés dans l'enchantement d'un eternel baiser!*"

I will not spoil the effect by translating! But, exaggerated as it may seem in (as I write) rain-sodden England, that is the spirit of the place—and especially of the Sultana's garden by moonlight.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

In which the sight of a woman driving a motor-car completely disorganizes a native fair; and showing that even a machine may suffer from thirst.

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

A BAD PATCH OF ROAD IN MOROCCO

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

NATIVE INTEREST IN OUR LITTLE A.C.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A RUN that, for us, was comparatively short faced us on the morning of our departure from Fez, the distance to Casablanca, via Meknes and Rabat, being only about 270 kilometres, or less than 170 miles. Our information was that the route was good and interesting throughout its length, so it was with anticipation of having something more nearly approaching a normal day's motoring that we set forth. Striking across the Sais Plain, the road was wide and fairly flat, with the suggestion of a mountain range in the far distance. There, we knew from our maps, lay the holy city of Moulay Idriss, and we rather regretted that our itinerary did not take it in. Volubilis, too, or the ruins of that ancient city, lay in that direction, marking the extreme limit of Roman penetration westwards. That also lay off our route; in fact, we were specially warned to avoid the right-hand road of the fork some twelve kilometres out of Fez, which would have taken us eventually to Rabat, and led within speaking distance of the famous places I have mentioned.

We had, instead, the prospect of seeing Meknes, "the Versailles of the Sultans," as we had heard it termed; and as the road was quite good and the scenery pleasing, we were content to run quietly along in a more leisurely fashion than had been our habit—and necessity—of late. A military railway accompanied us with very few divergences all the way; getting tired, about halfway to Meknes, of being ever on our left, the line crossed over, but no sooner had we emerged from the consequent

tunnel than the railway apparently changed its mind and came back to the left again. I couldn't help wondering why the expense of the two railway bridges had been incurred, as there appeared to be absolutely no reason why the line could not have continued on the left. However, that was no business of ours; and shortly, having crossed the Oued Nja by a quaint old bridge instead of the causeway of earlier experiences along this North African road, we ran through the beautiful Mahdouma Valley. The fertility of this as well as the immediate surroundings of Fez was a pleasant change after the uninteresting country through which we had passed on the way there, while the mountains which now imposed their bulk between us and Moulay Idriss, although not much more than 2,000 feet at their highest point, had quite an appearance of majesty. All the way along this road, at intervals of about fifteen kilometres, we noticed small, square forts or guard-huts—sort of glorified sentry-boxes, with an iron-barred room capable of housing about twenty prisoners.

After little more than an hour's run, we saw afar off the first signs of Meknes, and the delicate tracery of its numerous towers and minarets prepared us for the magnificent spectacle which awaited our closer approach; though, from our previous experience of these oriental towns, we rather expected that the enchantment of distance would prove deceptive. But the wonderful proportions and graceful lines, not to mention the intricate tiling, of the Bab el Mansour, the finest example of Moorish gates in Meknes, reassured us. Within the city we found the streets relatively straight and most amazingly clean, while the enormous size of some of the buildings and the gorgeous decoration of even the meanest of shop-fronts made us feel that there must be something exceptional about this place which did not apply to the average Moorish town. It was very obvious

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

"SUDDENLY A CASUAL GLANCE DISCOVERED THE WOMAN AT THE WHEEL"

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that some strange influence had been at work to secure the general elegance and air of well-being that is the strongest characteristic of Meknes. Later we discovered that it was built practically in its entirety to please the vanity of that tyrannous Sultan, Moulay Ishmael, whose name lives in history if only for the reason that he sought —unsuccessfully, be it said—to wed a niece of Louis XIV.

But we did not know these things during our actual visit to the city, and we meandered through its streets in a state of growing bewilderment. It didn't seem real, or right, in spite of its beauty! And, descending from the sublime to the practical, no matter how unromantic, we found in Meknes an opportunity to replenish the petrol tank. The intrusion of our ultra-modern means of transport created little interest among the crowds who watched with unmoved faces the antics of the snake-charmers; listened, apparently without hearing, to the tales of the professional story-tellers; or took part in the varied amusements of the fair that was apparently in progress. But suddenly a casual glance discovered the Woman at the Wheel of our little A.C. Immediately all was turmoil; they swarmed about the car and made it impossible for me to proceed without mowing them down. Children clambered on the running-boards, and peered through the windscreen and windows with most embarrassing curiosity. In a matter of seconds the snake-charmers were deserted; the monotonous sing-song of the story-tellers ceased, and the lemonade-sellers put down their bottles and joined the swarm around the car. I got a little desperate after a while, for it seemed that we should never be able to get away, and so, sounding a mighty blast on the klaxon, I let the clutch in gently and forged inch by inch on bottom gear through the palpitating mass of humanity.

I suppose that they had never before seen a woman

driving a motor-car at Meknes; and, as a matter of fact throughout our tour in every country except France my presence at the wheel seemed to be a matter for wonderment. Repeatedly, as we drove away from the hotels in the mornings, a crowd would gather, and I would be speeded on my way with cries of "*Brava, señorita!*" or equivalent words in the language of the country in which we happened to be, together with much clapping of hands and waving of handkerchiefs. It rather surprised me at first, for the woman driver at home is such an everyday sight that she is scarcely given a second thought or look.

Well, at last we got clear of Meknes; and I don't really know whether I ought to mention what happened next! Anyway, we encountered a lady of colour who had gone many stages farther than even we in England in the simplification of feminine clothing; in fact, she hadn't anything on at all! What one might accept as a commonplace in the more savage lands of Africa thousands of miles to the south gave us rather a shock in practically civilized Morocco; but our thoughts were switched with startling suddenness to more important matters as we all heard a most unpleasant noise emanating apparently from our back axle.

Hastily stopping the car, I waited in fear of what we should learn while my husband threw aside cushions and floor-boards and placed his hand on the axle-casing —only to snatch it away in pain, as the axle was much too hot to touch. He then looked to see how much oil was left, and found—none! Here was a pretty state of things! Nearly 200 kilometres yet to Casablanca, where alone we could hope to obtain the right kind of lubricant, and the axle dry. We had proposed to give the car a thorough inspection on reaching that town, and the axle, of course, would have come in for its share of attention. From previous experience we had imagined

that the original stock of oil in the axle-casing would suffice until our arrival at Casablanca; but I am afraid I must admit that we had miscalculated, not taking into account the fact that the kind of work the car had been doing was far more trying, and, apparently, oil-consuming, than a similar number of miles on English roads. Well, there we were, and there was seemingly no way out of the predicament, until suddenly I remembered that we had on board a can of engine oil, with much of the contents still intact. My husband agreed that even this thin oil—Castrol XL—would be better than nothing, though it was far from being of the correct character for the job. When the oil was poured in there was an ominous sizzling as it was " fried " on the hot metal, and smoke issued from the filling orifice, and it was with many misgivings that we started off again.

It was a question thereafter of going just as gently as it was possible to do to save the axle from undue stress until at Casablanca we could give it the beverage for which it thirsted, so we trundled on through Dar Oum es Soltan without further protests from the rear of the car. With the railway for company, we carried on to Ain Lorma, and thence through picturesque country to the pretty valley through which ambles the Oued Beht. A winding ascent from the river brought us to a less interesting region, scrubby and flat; and after passing through Khemisset, perched on its hill-top, there were still more miles of monotonous, though homely, pasture-land. Tiflet, also built on a height bordering the river, was the next objective, and soon, after a hilly section, we entered the south-west portion of the great oak Forêt de Marmora. We wound our way through this magnificent forest for some sixteen kilometres, and within a few minutes beheld the beautiful twin-towns of Salé and Rabat, on the Atlantic coast, at our feet, nearly twenty kilometres away.

We were much too worried about our poor axle—and the wounded spring, by the way, though that was in danger of being forgotten in the new trouble—to pay much attention to architectural wonders *en route*, especially in view of the fact that we should be returning through the two towns in a day or so, on the way to Tangier, so we kept going steadily if slowly for Casablanca. The remaining 99 kilometres of this day's tragically-ending journey were over quite the finest road we had found since leaving Monte Carlo. It was of tarred macadam construction and was just as English in appearance and smoothness as any of our main thoroughfares at home. It was a great relief to know that the axle was going to be let down so lightly, and when at last Casablanca gleamed up on the horizon, we knew that we were safe for the time being.

What permanent damage had been done to the axle it was impossible to say without taking the whole thing down; and as we had no possible means of repair at hand, my husband contented himself at Casablanca with emptying away the thin oil, swilling out the interior thoroughly with paraffin, and refilling with the best gear oil that could be obtained. This, unfortunately, was still not quite what the axle needed, but we had to make do with it and hope for the best. And, as the car had come through from Meknes quite happily, so far as it was possible to tell, on the thin oil, the hope did not seem too far-fetched.

But it can be imagined that with this additional worry on our minds our frame of mind at Casablanca was not over cheerful!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

In which we come upon Marrakesh the Red in circumstances that justify the name, and see poverty at its uttermost depths.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Our first job in the morning was to collect our letters from the post office, and a particularly difficult one it proved. Casablanca seemed to be an awfully complicated sort of place, all the streets radiating back to the centre of the town. We wasted a lot of time before we found the general post office, only to discover that there was no mail there for us. Then we learnt that there was also what is called the British Post Office, so off we went again to seek for this. Eventually we came upon it in the last place in which one would think of looking—in the heart of the native quarter. Manipulating the car in and out of the narrow streets was most difficult and annoying; but we certainly saw Casablanca! Not that one would want to particularly, for the native element has been almost entirely obliterated, and in contrast with the highly efficient modern Western buildings in the city, the poverty of the native settlement, constructed of old tins, bits of timber and scraps of sacking—the discarded odds and ends of the invading town-dwellers—is pitiful. Casablanca, alas, is not now Morocco; in fact, in its modern cosmopolitanism it has lost trace of its origin to a greater extent than any other North African city that we visited. So we did not find our peregrinations in search of the British Post Office at all amusing.

We all got a good packet of letters, among them things that I had been anxiously awaiting, so I forgave

Casablanca its several eccentricities. But we had not yet done with them. The time now came to find the way out to Marrakesh; and anyone who happens to know the town will have little difficulty in understanding where we did find difficulty! For one of the outlying parts of the town is also named Marrakesh—the very part, in fact, in which lay the British Post Office! Consequently, on asking the way to our destination, we were merely directed back to the place from which we had just come. Thus a lot more time was wasted, and it began to seem to me not worth while to go on to Marrakesh, since we must arrive too late to see much of the town, while the great god Schedule demanded that we should not linger the following morning. In addition, my husband had been against the trip from the beginning, since we were still running on the broken front spring, our axle was doubtful, and we also had only one spare tube. But our observer had set his heart on going—in fact, the journey was his suggestion originally, I believe—and, as I remarked in an earlier chapter, he begged me " not to be faint-hearted " about it. At least an hour and a half had been spent in finding the false Marrakesh, but I gave way, and leaving the native quarter behind—for the last time, thank goodness!—we sped out on the famous tarmac road towards the nearest town of Medjouna, on the Casablanca-Settat-Marrakesh road. The surface was very good indeed, as may be imagined when it is remembered that this road, all the way to our destination, formed part of the circuit of a recent road race, in which only one car finished, all the others having " blown up " their engines owing to the terrific pace possible! The circuit was Casablanca-Marrakesh-Mogador-Mazagan-Casablanca; but we did not explore the whole of the course.

Having learned all this beforehand, it was with a

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

"A CHARABANCS PACKED TO THE BRIM WITH NATIVES CAME IN SIGHT"

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certain amount of pleasure that I anticipated the fine run, despite uneasiness concerning our wounded spring, which had simply got to hold up until we reached Gibraltar—where, also, we meant to pick up reinforcements to our stock of tyres. Unfortunately the latter part of this intention had to be modified, as somewhere about half-way to Marrakesh we had a burst, and the only spare was put into service. It was necessary, therefore, to obtain supplies on returning to Casablanca —but I am running too far ahead. Although the run was very enjoyable, it was taken in the face of Providence, and I was not really surprised when we ran out of petrol some four miles from the nearest town, Ben Guerir. This, incidentally, was the only time on the tour when this misfortune actually happened, although on several occasions we were only just saved!

Now, however, the engine "conked right out"; fortunately there were natives working on the road nearby. They soon saw our difficulty, and one of them volunteered to run into Ben Guerir and get us sufficient "juice" to take us to the town ourselves. We knew that this must take at least an hour and a quarter, even at the jog-trot that these people seem to be able to keep up indefinitely. Still, there was nothing else for it, so routing out the only suitable receptacle—an empty bottle —we gave it to the volunteer, watched him set off, and settled ourselves to wait with what patience we could muster.

The last faint hope of being able to see anything of the place we had come so far, and at such risk, to visit had disappeared, through one delay and another; but as we were then only about forty miles from Marrakesh, there was nothing for it but to go on. Having sat still for about half an hour, a char-à-bancs, packed to the brim with natives, came in sight, and, feeling a little doubtful about the certainty of our runner's return, we

" flagged " the vehicle and begged for a drop of petrol to take us on to Ben Guerir. The driver, a young French colonist, was only too willing to help us, and even refused payment for the spirit with which he supplied us. In the meantime, the native passengers of the char-à-bancs realized that a short stop was to be made, and at once took the opportunity of stretching their legs. We soon saw that the necessity must have been sore, because the stream of Moors and Arabs descending from inside and outside the vehicle on to the road seemed to be never-ending. There could not have been fewer than a hundred passengers, on a vehicle which in England would not be licensed to carry many more than half that number! They did not seem to be at all annoyed at the hold-up—in fact, quite the reverse, and sat around on their heels with cheerful patience while the driver, at some little trouble, drained off enough petrol for our immediate needs.

Although the check to our progress had not been a very serious one, it was delightful to hear the little engine humming merrily again, and it was with a joy worthy of a much more important deliverance that we set off to overtake or meet the runner—if we saw him at all. When we had nearly reached the town he came in sight, jog-trotting tirelessly along; but, lo and behold! our lemonade bottle was as empty as when we had handed it to him! Whether he had drunk the contents or not we could not make out from his Arabic explanation, but he certainly and unmistakably demanded money, so I suppose the reason was good in his eyes. Impatiently paying him, we hastened on to get our tank refilled, for it was possible that the native had been trying to tell us that there was no fuel to be obtained in Ben Guerir.

The Djebilat range of hills now appeared on the sky-line, intervening between us and our destination,

but they were particularly illusive, seeming always to keep their distance, no matter how far and fast we went. At last we came to the foot, about eight miles to the north of Marrakesh. Winding our way to the summit, we came suddenly upon what even now I remember as the most marvellous sight of the whole tour—Marrakesh the Red, in the rays of the setting sun.

Backed by the mighty Atlas Mountains, snow-capped and almost violet in the distance, Marrakesh in its encircling, loopholed wall is beautiful—and ominous. Blood-red in the sunset, one can scarcely believe that the town has settled down to commerce after the long centuries of strife for which the eight-mile circle of ramparts was constructed. The solidity of this great wall emphasizes the grace of the slender minarets soaring high above the domes and flat roofs of palace and hovel, and the general red tint of the mud and brick brings out the gleaming whiteness of such buildings as are constructed of stone. Around and amidst it all, thousands of graceful palms, and a fugitive glimmer of the water of the oasis—blood-red also in the rapidly failing light—gave the final touch of glory to this wonderful picture. But I wonder whether the whole effect is not gained by virtue of those magnificent peaks, rising sheer to 15,000 feet, which by their austerity throw up the very erring, human brilliance of the Red City?

I have been asked which I liked the better—Fez or Marrakesh. But one might as well try to compare a motor-car with a grand piano! The two towns are so utterly different that one cannot find a point at which to begin a comparison. Each is perfect in its own way; but each is different from the other, and from anything else that I saw, or am ever likely to see. Fez we explored fairly thoroughly, but Marrakesh I feel I must study again in all its aspects—from the hill-top at sunrise as well as at sunset; in the pure morning light I

feel that the sinister redness would be softened to a merely welcoming warmth. But that is for a future day. On that evening we hastened on down the hill when our first wonderment was over, anxious to get into the town before the rapid darkness fell. As we descended we saw more clearly the separate items of which the town was composed—tiny dots resolving themselves into palms and individual buildings.

But soon we had to concentrate on finding one or other of the three Transatlantique hotels which we understood were situated in the town. The one which eventually we did find was just as remarkable, though far from being as luxurious, as the Palais Jamaï. It was just a native dwelling, altered only in so far as was absolutely essential to convert it into a guest-house, and standing in the midst of the native leather quarter—almost in the *soûk* itself. The atmosphere of utter strangeness was rather thrilling, though scarcely what a weary Western traveller looks for at the end of a long day. But, taking the rough with the smooth, our stay was a distinct experience, which had to be taken to excuse any slight lack of comfort of which we might otherwise have felt inclined to complain.

It may be remembered that we were resigned to the necessity for hurrying away as early as possible in the morning, and whatever sightseeing we wanted to do had to be done that night. So hastily disposing of our dinner, we set forth into the town. The shops and stalls of the *soûk* were closed, but street trade was still in progress. Bread seems to be the staple diet of these people, but even this modest article of food was too expensive for many of the poor people whom we saw. It may have been that from the time and place of our inspection we obtained an exaggerated idea of the poverty of the town; it may have been through the violent contrast of the quarter with the almost aggressive

luxury of the finer buildings of Marrakesh, but the state of the lower classes there seemed to us to be too utterly dreadful. It made one's heart ache to see the poor wretches fingering the bread and going away empty-handed when they found that they had not enough money to purchase even the smallest portions in the bread-sellers' stocks. Time after time we saw this happen—how many hands it had passed through, and what was the state of the bread before it reached that mouth for which fate had destined it cannot even be guessed—but I was very glad that the mouth in question didn't happen to be mine!

We were too depressed by these sad sights to investigate very far, especially as beggars were everywhere—far worse in appearance and more numerous than those we encountered at Fez. Blind, deformed, diseased—I don't like to think of it! But we soon found that we were acquiring a following of these dreadful creatures, and so we made for our hotel to escape them. Moaning and crying for alms, they followed us right back, and then seated themselves in the courtyard off which our bedrooms opened (and in which the car was garaged), still making their awful, unearthly noise. I was tempted to give them money, if only to get rid of them, but fortunately was warned in time that to do so would only attract still more of the horrors, and render sleep quite out of the question for that night. So I bore with the sound—which brought to my mind the phrase, "the torment of the damned"—and was sufficiently tired to sleep in spite of it. This was lucky, for awaking hours later, the moaning was still in progress—which made me rather lose sympathy, and look upon the whole thing as a peculiar and very unpleasant form of entertainment before falling asleep again.

Marrakesh must have legends by the thousand, and sights worth seeing at every turn; in fact, I know that

it has, but I am not going to talk about things which I did not actually see. In the morning I had hoped to be able to squeeze in an hour in spite of our need for haste, but, of course, it was raining! Also, by this time we were getting rather blasé after so many new experiences, while I certainly was beginning to feel the strain of our enormous mileage during the past few weeks. The effect was most noticeable in that the number of hours during which I could drive with enjoyment, before the task became irksome, was getting smaller and smaller each day. At the start, as you know, I drove for seventy consecutive hours, and was not too "done" at the end of it. Then the short change in Monte Carlo put me right again, and I was able to go through long and trying days in Italy without being more than normally fatigued. But at last I had to admit that I should not be sorry when we got home—which is saying a lot! And my husband, too, although he had not actual charge of the wheel, probably felt the responsibility even more than I did. I had become an automaton; he realized it, and worried—silently, thank goodness!—as to how long the two machines (the car and myself) could go on. The always-present fear as to what damage had been done to the poor axle, and whether it would hold out, together with continuing to run on a broken spring had got on both our nerves, although the effect on the riding of the car was scarcely noticeable.

The result of all this was that we were probably not so disappointed as we ought to have been, or should have been in other circumstances, at missing what Marrakesh had to show. But we heard many tales of the splendour of last year's queer succession of Royal weddings when the Sultan's marriage preceded by a week the triple "tying-up" of his three sons. Anyway, at about nine o'clock we set out on the return

journey by the same road of Casablanca, with the intention of carrying on to Rabat that night.

Except for the fact that I am not a good sailor, our original scheme of sailing from Casablanca would have been wiser, but more of that when we get there! In spite of the rain, we made splendid time on the run back, and I even forgot that we were without a spare tyre. We actually averaged something like forty-eight miles an hour for four and a half hours on the journey, and arrived at Casablanca very early, obtained the necessary spare tyre, and set off for Rabat, which we reached at about seven o'clock that evening.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

In which we perilously adventure through the Riff country at dead of night, and fear being held up in the mountains by lack of petrol.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

At Rabat, which is the official seat of residence of the Sultan of Morocco, and, with its sister-city of Salé, is a model of all that a Moorish city should be, we hoped to get final information upon the next stage of our journey—our last run in North Africa. All we could learn, however, was the somewhat indefinite and not very hopeful statement that the Riff country was still unsafe in the extreme, and also that we should be wise to make a very early start in the morning, as, even if we desired to take the risk of crossing the mountains after dark, we should not be permitted to do so by the Spanish guards at the border of the danger zone on the road to Tangier. A river, we understood, marked this spot, just beyond Larrache, and this would be crossed by a pontoon bridge. It was there that we must expect to be held up if we arrived too late—after sunset, we were told.

As we met with nothing but the most perfect courtesy and even friendliness from all the natives with whom we had come into contact so far, we rather fancied that the tales of danger from the Riffs were of an alarmist nature. We are always optimists, my husband and I! But although we did not let all this worry us much, it was with a somewhat hazy idea as to what was in store for us that we left Rabat in the morning. It was after seven when I awoke, so our toilette and breakfast were very sketchy functions. In record time we paid the bills and strapped the luggage on the car, and were off on

the distinctly " last but not least " stage of our African journey.

Needless to say, we saw scarcely anything of the town, although we have been told since that it is famous for everything that is lovely, and that no tour can be called complete that does not include a prolonged course of sightseeing there. But one always hears these things afterwards, and I had long since ceased regretting the things that the necessity for haste made us miss. Having got so far, one object, and one alone loomed ever larger in my mind—to get my little A.C. home intact. If the Sultan of Morocco had given me the free run of the State coffers and any risk to the fulfilment of this object had been involved thereby, I think I should have passed by the opportunity without a pang! But we didn't see the Sultan, or much of his city either as we commenced what proved to be a very miserable journey, especially in our wounded state. The road almost at once became a rough, mountainous track. Normally the broken spring had practically no effect on the running of the car, although we had travelled just on a thousand miles since the crash over the wickedly-projecting railway line which injured it, but on a bad surface the " wound " made driving doubly difficult. My husband warned me to steady down, as there was no knowing how long the remaining leaves would hold up under the strain, while if they should break on this road we should undoubtedly be stranded, perhaps many miles beyond a possible hope of repair.

Even our natural optimism nearly broke down, for everything seemed to be going against us—first, the wretched road on which we could do nothing to make up the lost time, and then the blinding rain which rendered even more desolate the bleak and barren country through which we were passing. We began to appreciate that our original advice to sail from

Casablanca was based on better grounds than we had believed, as this road was one which no self-respecting club could recommend to its members! However, our stock remark—"There's nothing for it but to carry on!" which either my husband or myself had found cause to make more times than I can remember—came into force once again. Even if we had turned tail and run back to Casablanca, we could not then have caught our boat—the same one upon which we proposed to embark at ten o'clock next morning from Tangier—and as all our future plans were based on sailing by that particular Bland liner, we had no alternative. So we "carried on," though the fear haunted us that after all the trouble and misery of this journey we might be too late at the pontoon bridge to get to Tangier that night.

Well, in due course we came to the frontier; and our experience at Babouch, on the Tunis-Algeria frontier, was repeated. The place was so small that we overshot it without knowing of its existence—the more particularly as by some misapprehension we had not expected to have to comply with any formalities until that dreaded pontoon bridge was reached. We were brought to a standstill at the point of the bayonet by two elaborately uniformed Spanish sentries. My husband soon explained the mistake, and we were much relieved to find that we had only to furnish evidence of identity, there being no examination of luggage or usual customs formalities, and we were quickly on our way again.

Crossing the frontier river by a bridge, we ran into the town of El Ksar el Kebir, and struck for the first time real difficulty in making ourselves understood. The official language was, of course, Spanish, of which none of us had the slightest knowledge. But with the aid of dictionaries we endeavoured to inquire the way, though our pronunciation must have been very bad as we eventually had to discover the route for ourselves.

It is amazing what an immense difference one often notices in the surroundings and conditions, and even in the natives themselves, on either side of a purely arbitrary frontier line. Here we sensed at once an entirely different atmosphere. The people were more unkempt and poverty-stricken; the country was even more bleak and ugly; and I am sorry to say that once again we came upon evidence of inhuman cruelty to animals—a fault from which the Arabs do not suffer. Once we were over the borders of Spanish Morocco, the condition of the animals was even worse than that which had caused us sorrow in Italy. Every donkey had a terrible wound where it had been urged onwards at the point of a sharp stick. I tried not to look at these terrible sights, though in fact the beasts were often so hopelessly overladen that it was difficult to discover the actual donkey beneath its towering burden. So far as overloading is concerned, the people themselves seem able to stagger along under just as heavy loads as their animals, and often I saw old men and old women—though more often the latter—bent double under a pile of fuelling or miscellaneous goods which completely obliterated them. Repeatedly I saw ahead of me on the road what was apparently an animated bundle of firewood of Gargantuan proportions moving apparently of its own volition, and it was not until we were right upon it that it was possible to tell which particular variety of beast of burden was responsible for its erratic motion.

And oh the mud! Again and again we were temporarily stuck with the rear wheels spinning merrily. The whole town was apparently "up" for repair. Also, we were desperately hungry, for the hour was just on three o'clock. We knew that we must be nearing the pontoon, and as we still fondly imagined that we had until sunset to get there, time could be spared

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

LIQUID MUD NEAR SEVILLE

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

ON THE BORDER OF THE RIFF COUNTRY

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for a meal. But our experiment in the Spanish tongue had not made us very hopeful of making our wishes known even at a restaurant in this particular town, and we decided to carry on to Larrache before stopping for food. This place, when we reached it, was evidently some sort of military centre, for there were innumerable Spanish officers about in khaki; but although the presence of the military can generally be taken to indicate reasonable hotel and restaurant facilities, it was not so in this case.

We had considerable difficulty in finding the one and only hotel; and there the meal was very poor indeed. Fish so thoroughly soused that the fact of its being tainted was scarcely discernible is my principal recollection of that belated lunch.

And to add to our troubles, the hotel manager informed us, when we inquired as to the correct route out of the town for Tangier, that it was already too late, as the pontoon bridge was closed at three-thirty, and that we should have to stay where we were until morning! This was unthinkable for a variety of reasons; and our policy is always to find out such things for ourselves. So, after a lot of difficulty in finding the way, we went down to the bridge, only to be held up as we had been warned. But once again producing our magic route-map, this time printed in Spanish, we showed it to the soldiers, and explained as best we could that it was absolutely vital to reach Tangier that night. And the map won the day for us, for with a shrug of the shoulders the guards let us through, saying what I imagined to be something about our blood being on our own heads.

Joyfully we entered the forbidden land; though apart from our moral victory there was little enough to be joyful about. The country became more and more rugged and rough, and the rain poured down more heavily than ever. As we plunged through the great

pot-holes, liquid mud spurted all over our long-suffering car; and darkness was beginning to fall. Not a soul was to be seen—not even those fierce Riffians of whom everyone had tried to frighten us.

Suddenly I heard a sharp report. "The Riffs!" I cried. But it was only a rear tyre gone pop! We realized then how wise we had been to take the opportunity in Casablanca to get a spare, as it may be remembered that the previous burst, on the road back from Marrakesh, had absorbed our sole remaining tyre. My poor husband, who had all the dirty jobs to do, without even the compensation of driving, got to work at once; and while we were thus halted a great grey object loomed up in the distance. It did not seem to bear any likeness to beast or vehicle, but on its closer approach we saw that it was an armoured car, the crew of which, as they passed, waved excitedly to us and shouted what we took to be admonitions to make haste and get out of the danger zone. But we couldn't have hurried if we had wanted to on that awful road, and anyway, except for the armoured car and, later, a bunch of horsemen—they might have been robbers or enemies, for all we knew, but as we were going much faster they were soon out of sight—we saw nothing at all out of the normal on this road. But the rest of the journey was not to be without excitement, or at least anxiety, for we had not gone far after the tyre trouble before once again the carburettor protested at being starved, and we had to turn to the low-level, a reserve supply of petrol sufficient for about twenty-five miles. We were not sure of the exact distance yet remaining to be covered, so to make the fuel last as long as possible I coasted down every hill. We actually succeeded in getting to the outskirts of Tangier before the petrol was exhausted, but fortunately were able to fill up at a garage, where also we found awaiting us the R.A.C. agent, to whom we had

wired to expect our arrival. We were many hours late, and he had been most anxious as to what had become of us.

"How on earth have you managed to get through at this time of night?" was his greeting. "Surely the bridge was closed?"

"Oh, we managed somehow," I replied, being too tired to go into details.

"Well, it is a very brave thing that you have done," he replied. Holding up his hands so that we could see the bullet wounds in them, he continued: "Look, this is what the Riffs have done to me!"

Cold shudders ran up and down my spine, and those horsemen became in my mind an army of hostile Riffs. I quite convinced myself that we had had a very lucky escape, and felt my importance as the Special Correspondent of a London paper very much as I made up my mind to get something through on the wires. Afterwards, when I saw in print my story in full, headed "Woman's Dash Through Riff Country," I felt quite a heroine!

We put up at the Hôtel Cecil in Tangier; and I should not have been at all sorry if it had been the establishment of the same name in London, where, on our arrival back in town, we were expecting to be entertained to lunch to celebrate the completion of the tour. In the meantime, however, any hopes we might have had of seeing anything of the town were once again doomed to be dashed, for we learnt that in order to be sure of getting our car on to the boat, which sailed at ten o'clock next morning, it was necessary to be on the quay in readiness not later than eight o'clock. We were there, of course; but the result is that I have nothing whatever to say about Tangier!

There was much excitement on the quay, and although the scene was interesting to watch, the thing

that stays in my memory is the very unpleasant sight of cattle being shipped, a crane being used to lift them on to the ship, by the horns. I am told that the appearance of cruelty is not justified by the facts; that the cattle feel no more pain than does a dog or cat when you lift it by the scruff of the neck. But the sight of the poor beasts struggling in mid-air quite unnerved me, and I was righteously indignant when the craneman chose to carry on a conversation with a friend, leaving the brutes dangling and struggling until he had quite finished! And then he let them down with a bump, a refinement of cruelty—as it seemed to me—that could quite easily have been avoided if he had used ordinary care. Unfortunately all this was going on right at the very spot where we had to be to have our passports examined and so on, so that I could not avoid watching.

The primitive methods used for the cattle made me fear what further crudity would be practised on our motor-car, but as a matter of fact the actual process was most ingenious and effective. The wheels were placed in cradles consisting of two iron bars held at each end in a triangular frame, so that the more heavily the car pressed down on the bars, the more firmly were the latter forced into the angles at the base of the triangle. From the apex of each triangle ropes were taken so that the whole thing could be slung from the crane, and in this way the car was lifted on to the lighter, which in turn took it out to the ship. I was a little worried at first as to how the arrangement would work, but was assured that it was perfectly safe. In any case, everything went quite smoothly, and having seen the car comfortably bestowed on its lighter, we boarded the tug used to take passengers out to the big Bland boat. The sea was quite choppy, and I was glad to get on to the larger vessel.

The process of lifting the car from lighter to ship was more complicated and took longer. In fact, the captain

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

INGENIOUS METHOD OF SHIPPING CARS TO TANGIER

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

"THE SIGHT OF THE POOR BEASTS STRUGGLING IN MID-AIR UNNERVED ONE"

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informed me that it had held his ship up for half an hour, and what the prospective passengers by the Madrid express from Gibraltar would say to him for being late he did not know! He did not hold us to blame, however, and when we showed him the map of our tour was eager to hear of our experiences on the portions so far completed. At lunch we sat at his table and continued the story; but there were a great number of English people on board, and their friendliness and interest in our trip made us feel almost as though we were approaching our home shore.

While yet the African coast was visible, one passenger pointed out to me the spots at which famous engagements had taken place before the coast country was finally subdued, and told me how the correspondent of a great English newspaper—this had a personal appeal, of course!—was held up for ransom, and the paper paid the £20,000 demanded. I wondered if my paper would think I was worth so much! Gradually the African coast faded, and soon after lunch the Rock began to show up faintly in the distance.

In the meantime, I was very much annoyed to find on the boat the self-same leather cushions and tapestries (or their twin brothers) that I had purchased at various places in Africa, obtainable here for half the price that I had paid. The nearer England one gets, apparently, the cheaper are the various "native" goods—principally, I suppose, because most of them are "made in Birmingham" anyway! As a particular instance, I bought a very beautiful Indian tray abroad during one of my tours, and learnt recently that the factory where these things are turned out by the thousand is situated at Kingston-on-Thames, within a few miles of my own home at Esher!

The procedure of getting the car off the ship and on to a lighter on arriving at Gibraltar was much the same

as at Tangier; and we were greatly relieved to be met by another R.A.C. agent with the spare front spring for which we had been longing. The agent directed us to a hotel, and told us to meet him on the quay again in two hours, by which time he would have seen to all the formalities, and we should be free to leave. We filled in the time with coffee and a call at the post office, and then walked round the town—about which hackneyed subject I do not think I am called upon to comment. Everywhere I saw the most glorious Spanish shawls, and made up my mind to return to the shops later on and acquire yet another " souvenir." Having collected the car from the quay and driven it to a garage, I left my husband and the observer to deal with the change of springs, since I could be of little assistance in this matter, and scuttled back to the shops, where I was soon in the throes of " trying on." Each shawl that I saw threw into the shade the beauties of the previous one, but I set my mind rigidly against the more expensive specimens and eventually bought what in England we should consider a magnificent example for a very reasonable price.

And so I went away happy; but the amusing part of the purchase was that, finding I had very little loose cash with me, I suggested, in fun, that they would have to take a cheque. I did not dream for a moment that this would be accepted, but the little Indian who kept the shop agreed at once. I proposed to fetch my passport, as at least evidence of my identity, but the shopkeeper said smilingly :

" It is not necessary. You are English. That is sufficient ! "

Can anyone wonder that sometimes we are proud of our nationality ?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

In which I ask for sleeping accommodation at the local museum of a Spanish city; and vainly seek a bull-fight.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THERE was much to do before setting off for Seville in the morning. We had not seen any English papers since leaving Rome, and even if they had been obtainable at such towns as Algiers, we should not have had time to read them. But now the time had come when we must obtain definite news as to the progress of events in Portugal, since in a few days, if we were to adhere to our original itinerary it would be necessary to cross the frontier just beyond Badajoz on our way to Lisbon. But, as I think I have mentioned before, a revolution broke out during the early days of our tour, and threatened a compulsory change of plan. At the time, we dismissed the question with the fond hope that the disturbance would fizzle out in time for us to travel in the country, but we had to make sure. The papers, however, gave us little help; though I was rewarded by finding my own story of our "Dash Through the Riff Country."

So we hied us to the garage in search of information, the manager having already shown himself most obliging and interested in our programme. He told us that the country was still supposed to be very unsettled, and not very safe for motoring. As to roads, he had no personal knowledge, but believed that they were very bad. If I had only known how bad a road must be to be so designated by a Spaniard, I think I should have moved for the abandonment of the Portuguese trip then and there! But, as usual, we decided to find out for our-

selves what conditions were like, and in the meantime asked for direction on the road to Seville.

There are two roads, the manager told us; one good and the other bad. Naturally, we chose the good one; but heaven preserve any poor, misguided motorist who finds himself on the other! You need to be a student of relativity in Spain! Our way lay right around the horseshoe bay at the eastern extremity of which lies Gibraltar, to Algeciras. The surface was not too bad, and anyway would have been excused by the glorious views out over the sea, and especially back over the rear of "Gib." Then, "cutting a corner" of the coast we struck inland slightly, without losing sight—for those who were free to turn their heads—of that little scrap of Britain-in-Spain which we had left. The country itself was rocky and rugged, some of the roadside rocks having weathered into the most grotesque of shapes. Of one, in which the wind and rain of countless ages had discovered a flaw and drilled a great hole clean through it, we had to stop and take a photograph. Having climbed over the winding ascent to the Puerto del Bujeo, at an altitude of about 1,000 feet, we came to the sea again at Tarifa and continued to skirt the coast for the next ten kilometres or so, striking inland then to the shores of the Laguña de Janda. Apart from the picturesqueness of the scenery on this part of the run, the only incidents that remain in my mind are our encounters with horsemen at various times. Lashing their horses along at a terrific and reckless pace, these *caballeros* were all dressed after the same pattern—and that pattern a picture of the "Don Q." with whom most of us are familiar—all complete with wide sombrero and voluminous cloak. Some thirty kilometres farther on, soon after passing through Chiclana de la Frontera, after rounding several mild hairpin corners, we came upon a ramshackle wooden bridge over an *arroyo* which

shook and rattled so terrifyingly as we ran on to it that I had to slow right down to walking pace. We learnt afterwards that this bridge is impassable at high tide, and our luck was evidently in that day, since if we had arrived without warning at this place when the road was interrupted with impassable water we should have been rather puzzled as to what to do. We carried on for the next thirty kilometres without further incident other than the passage of such level crossings and river bridges as we encountered, halting eventually for lunch at Jerez de la Frontera.

In the meantime, the country had become delightfully English once again, and after the barrenness of much of Northern Africa, picturesque and unusual though it might be, the change to fertile surroundings was very pleasant. As though to confirm the idea that this was one of our lucky days, the luncheon that we obtained was quite good, and rather shook the suspicion that by now we had begun to harbour against Spanish cooking. I noticed, by the way, that meal times are much later than at home, and later still than in France. Lunch, for instance, is taken between two and three o'clock, and dinner is by no means late at nine o'clock or after. The custom of starting a meal with an enormous pile of plates, corresponding with the number of courses of which that meal would consist, appealed to me as useful, for one could at least get an idea of the gastronomical task in store by counting the number of plates!

I have not said a lot about the road so far, because it was not very bad to start with. But in the last few miles before Jerez, the headquarters of the world's trade in sherry, distinct deterioration was noticeable, and after leaving that town on the final stage of seventy miles to Seville the surface began to get really bad, with frequent pot-holes and many bad gullies running right across the

road. The depth of the holes was deceptive, as it had been raining recently, and apart from the bumping to which we were thus subjected, we were not particularly pleased to see still another coating of mud being plastered over our saloon. But our complaints on this score were premature; no one can possibly know what mud really is until they have entered Seville in such conditions as we approached it—unless, of course, they repeat our experience at Pompeii. But bad as the mud there seemed at the time, I do not think it was at all comparable with that through which we had to plough at Seville.

Seeing before us two beautiful wide avenues, on the outskirts of the town, and finding no direction as to which was the better way, we chose the right hand road. Almost at once we were in thick, greasy mud at least six inches deep, and the foundation beneath was so soft that the wheels seemed to sink in to their very hub caps. Getting through this quagmire was a ticklish task, for which bottom gear was required for the sheer power necessary to break through the wretched, gluey substance. The day had not been so trying as many that we had survived recently, but this experience at the end of it did not exactly make for joy, while at the back of our minds was the dread that on reaching our destination we should again be faced with the difficulty of making ourselves understood. Spain was, in fact, the only country of those which we visited where the difficulty existed, and as a hint to those who have any idea of touring there I should say it is essential to obtain books on the language a few weeks in advance, and study at least the way to pronounce the words that you will be likely to need. You need not expect your smattering of French to help you in Spain, however useful it may prove in Italy or Africa.

After we had driven round and round, and round

again, asking everyone in sight the way to the Hôtel de Madrid, I am afraid we began to get a bit irritable!

At last a magnificent building hove in sight, and from our direction there seemed no doubt that this was the right hotel. Since I was supposed to have a better knowledge of Spanish than my husband—which is saying very little for his, by the way!—I was deputed to enter and arrange about accommodation. Going up to what appeared to be the bureau, I trotted out my very best Spanish phrases. If I had simply not been understood, I should scarcely have been surprised, since this had been the lot of all of us so often during the last few days.

But it was blank amazement rather than lack of understanding that I read in the face of the reception clerk. I couldn't quite see in what lay cause for surprise. Surely it was a natural enough thing to do —ask at the desk of a hotel if they could put us up for the night? So I was rather at a loss as to what to do, and glancing round in search of inspiration, or to find someone who looked as though he might possibly understand English or French, I saw with horror that the walls were lined with stuffed fish and lizards, and I did not need anyone to tell me that I had strolled unsuspectingly into the local museum instead of a hotel!

Covering my confusion as best I could, I retreated, and I hope I never have to go through such an ordeal again! And perhaps it would be as well for me not to mention what I told my companions about their cruelty and heartlessness in letting me make such an idiot of myself!

Well, all things, bad as well as good, come to an end, and at last we found the real Hôtel de Madrid. Here a fresh surprise awaited us. The ugly great square building, fronting on two streets and forming a whole

block on its own account, was not very promising; but inside it proved to be quite the most beautiful hotel that I have ever been in. An enormous sum of money must have been expended on its interior decorations. Fountains were playing everywhere—even in the reading-room—which, with the black and white marble walls and floors, gave the whole place an air of stately calm and religious peace.

By the by, I meant to mention further back that carnival had held sway throughout our journey through Southern Spain, and here at Seville we found no exception. Everywhere were music and dancing, weird masques, sombrely-clad *señoritas* whose bright eyes peeped provocatively through the folds of their dainty *mantillas*, and all the usual concomitants of carnival. It was almost impossible to move in the streets, and when, having put our car away, we needed a *voiture*, we found such vehicles obtainable only after much searching and at enormous expense.

The following day being a Sunday, and our official day of rest, we devoted it to sight-seeing. And there is much to see—much more than we saw, of course. Except that oriental architecture is not very evident (although the beautiful Giralda tower, from which a wonderful view of Sevilla the White can be obtained, is supposed to have been the minaret of a mosque), the atmosphere of the place reminded us very forcibly of the land we had just left. Warm sunshine, deep blue skies, oranges, palms and roses, and especially the beautiful gardens of the Alcazar, gave us a bright welcome on this first day of leisure in Spain. We visited the great cathedral and compared it, not greatly to its disadvantage, with St. Peter's at Rome; and saw also the tomb of Christopher Columbus, whose remains, I was told, were first transported from Valladolid, the place of his death, to Hayti, in which island he had expressed

a wish to be buried. But when the French captured Hayti, the body was removed to Havana, to be disturbed again in the Spanish-American War. It is fitting, of course, that the final resting-place should be the town from which more than four hundred years ago the great navigator set out on his voyage of discovery.

Every new scene is interesting, but I think it is the tendency of my husband and myself to seek novelty rather than the buildings, museums and churches which, after all, are much alike wherever one may go. The particular novelty which Spain seemed to offer was the bull-fight, and though we were in a very doubtful frame of mind as to the advisability of attending such an event, we were ignorant of the methods used at these affairs, and thought that possibly as a matter of experience we might risk it. But the result of more particular inquiry was that I was inclined to change my mind; I had no desire to see poor, worn-out horses, who had already given the best part of their lives in the service of men, gouged horribly to death, without the means of defending themselves, or even of escaping their fate. Thus, paying no thought to the bull—who does get some sort of a run for his money!—I decided against visiting a bull-fight, even if one were to be held.

We were told, however, that a great change is taking place even now in the conduct of this national sport (if so it can be called) and that in the future the horses are to be equipped with a steel armour; but whether this is already in force, or is merely a flight of the imagination I do not know. In any case, we did notice the growing popularity in which the game of football is held; it almost seemed, in fact, that the authorities are encouraging the youth of the country to take up the pastime, in the hope that the public liking for bull-fighting may gradually die out. However, this is mere supposition, but in the meantime we heard of a small fight that was

to be held that day a few kilometres outside the city, and as we were told definitely that no horses would be used, and cruelty would be avoided as far as possible, we decided to compromise and go.

First, however, we paid a visit to the great bull-ring of Seville itself, and although no fight was due to take place until Easter Sunday, the authorities very complacently showed us round. We saw the place where *el toro* is kept awaiting his turn to enter the ring, and the ingenious means by which the door is opened from above, by an attendant standing in the balcony; and pointing to the Royal box, our guide remarked:

"That is where *el rey y la reina* sit. The Queen, she attend, but she do wear large—how do you say?—goggles, so that she need not watch!"

This information also we took on trust, but I could not help imagining the feelings of horror with which our Princess Ena must have gone to her first bull-fight when she became Queen Victoria of Spain. And it struck me as rather curious, too, that the Spanish do not seem to mind this English peculiarity of their Queen, but I suppose she has made herself so deeply beloved in other ways that they are not wounded by the implied criticism. Or is it a sign of changing times? I hope so, anyway.

When we left the ring and at last discovered an unengaged *voiture*—or *coche* I suppose I ought to call it—we were horrified at the magnitude of the fare which the cabby asked for the little journey to the bull-ring which we proposed to visit. I forget the exact number of *pesetas* he demanded, but I do know that our joint stock of ready cash was barely sufficient to satisfy him. But we had not proceeded very far through the outskirts of Seville before we discovered why the charge was so large, and were very glad indeed that we had resisted the temptation to get our own car out of its garage. The road was quite unworthy of the name. Mud such as I

had never seen before, studded with bricks and rubble and bits of mortar, composed the "surface," and twice the taxi stuck with spinning wheels before we arrived at our destination—to find that the bull-fight had been postponed! We were not altogether sorry, as I, at any rate, had been rather dreading that Spanish "humane" methods might still be rather behind the English standard, and I do hate to see anything in the nature of cruelty to inoffensive animals.

So back we went through the "abomination of desolation" that had the impudence to call itself the road to Seville. But, to be fair, the state of that road is to some extent excusable, as it is a part of the scheme for the provision of good roads round the town, and is in the course of being given a *pavé* surface. This, I understand, involves rather considerable pulling-to-pieces of the existing surface. But if the extent of this preliminary process is any indication of the eventual excellence of the finished highway, this one ought to be a jolly good road when it is done!

Well, sight-seeing was beginning to pall by this time, so, to kill the few remaining hours until bed-time we "went to the pictures!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

In which mechanical matters intrude themselves again; and we learn that "Pologne" is not French for Portugal.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A SAD Sevilla greeted us next morning, weeping skies and a chilly atmosphere replacing the brilliance of the previous day. And it seemed an unhappy augury that we had to make a detour of many miles in leaving the town as the bridge over the River Guadalquivir was under repair. To avoid the danger of missing the way we took a pilot on board once again, a lucky precaution, since, unless our guide purposely led us much farther afield than was necessary in order to prolong his motor-ride, I am certain we could not have found the way unaided.

I am afraid my story of Spain is going to be a story of mud! It seemed to be the principal product of the country—though I must say that the careful cultivation of the land generally, and not only on this miserable rainy day when we couldn't see very much through the streaming windows of the saloon, afforded a striking contrast to conditions in Italy, which seemed to be scarcely tended at all. Our route lay through Las Pajanosas, Santa Olalla, and Monasterio—by which time (about two o'clock, so far as I can remember) we were all famished. As a matter of fact, Spanish cooking was beginning to tell upon us, for even at the good hotels the rich, oily nature of the food was rather unpalatable. We had, in fact, eaten very little, and were feeling very much under par in consequence. At Los Santos, therefore, we decided to make an effort to obtain something

to allay the pangs of hunger; we had been informed that there existed at Almendralejo a *pukka* A.A. hotel, but this was many kilometres farther on, and we wanted food badly. Inquiring for *el mejor fonda*—since " hotel " did not appear to be included in the provincial's vocabulary—we were directed down a narrow, muddy street which rapidly became so bad that further progress was impossible. It was equally impossible to turn round, so I had to reverse back forty or fifty yards through the filth to the main road again. It was not much use inquiring further, so we pushed on with the hope that the time would soon pass, and that we should reach Almendralejo before cannibalistic tactics became the order of the day! There was not so much as a biscuit on the car, for we had been assured at Seville that there would be no difficulty whatever in obtaining food on the road. But I have quite made up my mind that I will not stir in future, on a long tour, at any rate, without proper provisions, and a proper place in which to carry them. A good luncheon-basket, and especially a kettle and spirit stove, with a supply of English tea, would have been a godsend many a time on this tour of ours. At last we arrived, and though unsuccessful in finding the longed-for A.A. hotel, discovered another which turned out quite passable. We were amused to notice that little charcoal braziers were placed under each dining-table—a plan which we found later to be a general Spanish custom. But an incident occurred which would have been funny if we hadn't been so hungry. We asked for ham, and they brought it—raw ham! Needless to say, we had not quite got to the pass of dispensing with cooking. I suppose the explanation was that our Spanish word for ham—*jamón*—was not the right one for cooked ham; but there you are. Do learn a little of the language before you go to Spain!

But isn't it wonderful how our tummies influence our

outlook on life? The rain was just as bad as ever when we restarted after lunch, and the view just as dismal, but we actually achieved a few feeble verses of song as we bumped and splashed onwards through the mud.

In our haste to "get next" to a meal I don't think any of us paid much attention to the town of Almendralejo in entering, but I remember now that it was rather a quaint and confusing place. The main street, for instance, climbed up and up to a church at the top of the hill, beyond which there was apparently no more road. But we had been told to go that way, and we were going! So we turned down a mere foot-path, paved with great round cobbles, and so narrow that there would scarcely have been room for a pedestrian to squeeze by the car. At the bottom of this path there was actually a step of some six inches, down which we jolted into the local Square, where we found our hotel. We left by another street, just as narrow and full of mud and slush and holes—but by then we were feeling a little more kindly towards the world at large!

The next place for which we were making was Merida, where we had to turn off to the left for Badajoz, and I remember thinking to myself that it was a pity in view of our very doubtful back axle that we could not continue on to the north towards France and the end of the trip, instead of "going west"—fateful phrase—to Portugal.

We did not see much of Merida on this occasion, but approaching the town on our return from Badajoz it struck us as rather a fine place as it first came into view from a hill-top. The town is almost entirely circled by a river—the Guadiana I think it must be, since the rest of the journey to and from Badajoz lay through the valley of that name. But we are still on the way to Portugal and I am anticipating again! We were not to

reach our destination without a fright. We had heard a sound from somewhere beneath our feet earlier in the day, and as it did not persist had attributed it to a stone which had got lodged in the undershield and was being playfully stirred up by the flywheel. Shortly after taking the sharp turn to the left about a kilometre beyond Merida, the sound started again, but in a much worse form. I stopped as soon as I could, and on inspection my husband found that the rear axle was evidently beginning to run hot once more. All he could do at the moment was to pour in some more gear oil, but he told me to go gently thereafter, as trouble was bound to be in store for us, and it was up to me to put off the evil day as long as possible.

Running quietly on through Lobon and Talavera la Real, we came to Badajoz and the end of our day's journey without further alarms. But we couldn't believe either our eyes or our information when we were assured that the very mangy-looking hotel to which we were directed was actually the best in the town! And inside further cause for consternation awaited us. If the fact that our party now consisted of my husband and myself and the R.A.C. observer has not been lost sight of, our horror at being offered by the manager a large room very meagrely partitioned off with a curtain can be imagined. We tried very hard to convince him that this would not do, but could make no impression. He called it *dos dormitorios,* and " two bedrooms " it remains to him to this day.

Feeling pretty helpless and hopeless, we went out into the town in the hope of finding that we had been misinformed as to the status of this hotel, but could not discover anything more promising. There was a restaurant of sorts attached to the place, so, not knowing quite what to do with ourselves, we entered, and ordered tea. Something like half an hour passed before any-

thing happened, and when the tea did arrive all I can say is that it was quite as bad as we expected.

We were desperate; but in the darkest hour came help. A young man sitting at an adjoining table, hearing our efforts with the Spanish tongue, or seeing our despairing visages, leant over and asked if he could be of any assistance. Finding that he was English, we hailed him like a long-lost brother, and asked at once whether this was really the best hotel in the town.

"Yes, certainly," he said. "Don't you like it?"

"Like it!" I cried. "It's a beastly hole, and we'll never be able to get anything fit to eat, anyway!"

"Well, if you'll tell me what you want, I'll order it for you," he offered. "But unless you want a solid meal, why not come with me to a little café nearby, where at least I can recommend the coffee? You certainly won't be able to drink that tea!"

Any port in a storm, so off we trooped to a little place decorated in the Japanese style where, much as I prefer tea as a rule, I found the coffee very good indeed. This, we were told, is the place where most of the business of Badajoz is done. Everyone congregates there in the evening, and our friend said that he had spent many pleasant and profitable hours in the little place. He was in the motor business, it appeared, with headquarters at Madrid, and I was amazed to learn of the enormous trade that is done in Spain, especially in cars of the American type—the more amazed as we had seen very few motor-cars on the roads in the course of our travels so far, except, of course, in the towns.

But at last our troubles were over for the day—as far as they could be in Badajoz with its wretched hotel accommodation—for on telling our English acquaintance of our difficulty regarding the *dos dormitorios*, he went back to the hotel and put matters right for us.

We started bright and early next morning, leaving

Badajoz without a single regret. Our plans for the day were somewhat indefinite, as we had not the faintest idea where we should wish to spend the night, any information about the roads or anything else in connection with Portugal having been most surprisingly difficult to obtain. But everything went smoothly, and some six kilometres outside the town we were duly checked out of Spain at the Spanish customs-house. Crossing the River Caia, we entered Portugal geographically, if not legally, and drove on to the advance post of the Portuguese customs. Arriving there, my husband got out and entered the building. After waiting for ten minutes I began to get fidgety; at the end of a quarter of an hour, and still no sign of him, I was worried, and when in another five minutes or so he reappeared I was not surprised to see from his expression that something had gone wrong.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Aren't our papers in order?"

"We've come to the wrong country," my husband replied. "We ought to have gone to Poland!"

"Don't be so stupid," I said. "This is Portugal, isn't it?"

"No, it's 'No Man's Land.' Portugal's down the road there."

"Well, why don't you get the papers stamped, and let's get on with it," I said irritably. "I don't want to stay here all day."

"But didn't I tell you we ought to have gone to Poland?" he said smiling. "Look here"—shoving the *carnet* into my hand—"what does P-O-L-O-G-N-E stand for? You're our French scholar!"

Sure enough, there it was in black and white—Poland, in French.

"Well," I said, hopefully, "go and explain the mistake. They'll let us through all right."

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

"WE'VE COME TO THE WRONG COUNTRY!"

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

A CURIOUS ROCK ON THE ROAD NEAR GIBRALTAR

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"I have—and they won't," my husband dolefully replied. "There's nothing for it but to turn round and go back to Spain. Try and get to Madrid to-night, perhaps?"

"How far is it?" I asked.

"About a thousand miles, I think! We'll have the maps out when we are through the Spanish customs again."

Much cheered to know that Madrid was quite close by, I got the car round, and pushed her nice—but shiny—nose over the river into Spain again. (If a motor-car is a "she," why doesn't it use a powder puff, by the way?) Descending once more from his chariot, and leaving the "chauffeur" to wait in suspense, my husband tackled the job of explaining the error to the Spanish officials. But I wasn't much worried as to the outcome, since they had been so very nice and helpful when we passed half an hour before. Alas! The friendly crowd had gone for the day, and in a few minutes my husband returned for lingual assistance in dealing with strange officials. We all three entered the customs-house and endeavoured, by filling up the gaps in each other's knowledge of Spanish, to explain the situation. But the strangers had no knowledge of the circumstances, and after much fruitless talking, in which neither side understood many of the other's words, we made out that, according to their reading, we had not been anywhere, although we had left Spain. And, having come from nowhere, we could not be readmitted into Spain! I hope that's perfectly clear; but I always get rather tied up myself when I try to explain it! Anyway, the soldiers were quite emphatic that it was no business of theirs. They had passed us out, and it was up to the Portuguese to deal with subsequent problems; and until we could show that we had come from somewhere, we couldn't go anywhere their way.

"Let's try the Portuguese again," I said, getting tired of the blank wall that we seemed to be up against.

Dutifully the other two followed me out, and for the second time we crossed the (geographical!) frontier. But we received no sympathy at the other customs, and I am afraid that our plea was not very convincing, as it was perfectly obvious that unless our papers were in order to visit Portugal, they couldn't possibly, without getting into serious trouble from their superiors, let us into the country. Also, as they abruptly explained, even if they did let us go on, we should never be able to get out again, as the papers would be too hopelessly out of order for any rectification.

But this was getting too much of a good thing! If it had not been so irritating, the situation would have been funny—quite a comic opera affair, in fact. In the meantime, it seemed clear that we should have to make for Madrid when we did get away, and time was slipping by, while there was no knowing how much longer this ridiculous business was likely to continue. Back we went to the Spanish customs again, the soldiers greeting us with smiles. They could see the joke, if we couldn't! Possibly something of the same sort had happened before, and they welcomed our dilemma as a very pleasant break in the ordinary monotony of their outpost duty. Well, it's an ill wind, and all that sort of thing; but this time I was determined to get something settled. Finding that no amount of persuasion would get them to see sense, I demanded to see their *comandante* or *capitan* or something. *El comandante* was upstairs in his room, they said, but he could not possibly be disturbed for so trivial an affair.

Trivial! I marched upstairs, dragging the other two after me before the soldiers could stop me, knocked at the officer's door, and walked boldly in, in spite of a sinking heart.

I need not have been afraid, for with the politeness that is so charming a trait of the Spaniards of all classes, he rose and asked my pleasure—in English, thank heaven!

The situation was soon explained, and this time we were able to appreciate its humour, joining in the officer's merriment whole-heartedly. The *status quo ante bellum* was restored by the simple expedient of cancelling the document which showed our exit from Spain, and there we were, back again in dearly-beloved, muddy *España* as though we had left it only in our dreams!

The next thing to be settled was where we should go, but on consulting the officer, he advised us to make the attempt to get to Madrid, as there was no other town on the way at a suitable point where he could recommend us to spend the night. Rather more than 400 kilometres, he thought it was, but it was a fairly good road. "Yes," I thought; "I know your 'fairly good' roads. We shall call it a rotten road, and a few other things besides!" But I only thought it, and we set off again for Badajoz and Merida, with the idea, on the officer's advice, of making Trujillo for lunch. Rain had started again by now, and we splashed through the mud the whole way to Madrid. After leaving Merida, the road became very flat practically for the whole of the 230 kilometres to Talavera de la Reina, with the exception of a single sharp descent at Almaraz, from the top of which we could see, in a brief interval in the rain, for a distance of perhaps fifty miles across the lower-level plateau. We stopped for lunch at Trujillo, as we intended, had quite a nice meal, although we failed to make the waiter understand that as we were in a tearing hurry, we wanted only one course. There was the usual pile of plates in front of each chair, and it was only by getting up and calling for the *cuenta* that we managed to get away without going through the whole menu.

As we had noticed repeatedly, signposting in the south of Spain is not too good. Those direction posts that do exist are cast-iron plaques, on which the lettering has often rusted away so badly as to be illegible. There are very few mile, or rather, kilometre, stones, and these are mostly inaccurate. Soon after leaving Trujillo we came to a parting of the ways, and as there was, as usual, no signpost or any means of telling which was the right road, it was entirely a matter of guess-work. Luckily we guessed right—or perhaps it would be kinder and more just to say that my husband's wonderful sense of direction kept us on the right path. The road then began to get more hilly—it had been very bad, with frequent gullies, and mud-filled pot-holes, in justification of my mental prophecy, all along. Now we had dangerous corners in addition, and I was very glad of the halt which we made for tea in the sunset at Talavera de la Reina. This was the third time we had been to a town called Talavera in the last two days, by the way. There was one, " the Royal," on the road from Badajoz to Merida, which we passed through twice, and this, " Queen's Talavera," now.

It was quite dark when we left on the last stage of 117 kilometres for Madrid, after a refreshing cup of tea, and I must admit that I do not remember much of the road, except that it was very bad until we got to the outskirts of the capital, when, my husband reminds me, " it got a jolly sight worse ! " With regard to driving in the streets of the city, however, I can say that it did not seem any more difficult than through any other continental town, although the Club gives a long list of instructions from the Prefect of Police on the rule of the road, the use of the horn, and such matters. I got along smoothly enough, however, and this was not because of the lateness of the hour of our arrival, because the Spanish, or at least the *Madrileños* are as late in

their amusements as in their meal times, and Madrid was just getting into its swing when we got there. With the wisdom born of experience, we picked up a cabby to pilot us to the Savoy Hotel, and I was not at all sorry to find that for once the garage was not far away. I was still adhering rigidly to the idea of being entirely and solely responsible for the handling of the car, so that although my poor husband had all the " dirty work "—such as tyre-changing and so on—to do, with none of the compensations of driving, the task of putting her away at night and fetching her in the morning was one which he missed. But how thankful I would have been sometimes, when the garage proved to be half a mile or more away, to have handed the car over straight away on arriving at the hotel, so that I could indulge my " vice " for nice hot baths the sooner! Still, at the Savoy there was little to complain of, as the garage was close at hand, and I was quickly able to revel in the delights which I always craved at the end of a long day's drive.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

In which we marvel at El Escorial and cross the Sierras, gladly to enter France once more.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Before such sightseeing as we could spare the time for could be done in the morning, my husband had to pay a visit to the local Dunlop agency in order to replace the tyre which, though I did not mention it before, had handed in its checks the night before. Taking one of the spare wheels, upon which was the deflated tyre, he taxi-ed over, and found a very friendly welcome awaiting him, as the staff, including the managing director, had been following the progress of our tour with much interest. Nothing was too much in the way of assistance, and they were so perturbed at the idea of our making the next stage of our journey, over a road which they said was full of veritable death-traps, without guidance, that the managing director himself proposed to pilot us out beyond the danger-zone. My husband understood that the particular danger lay in hairpin corners at the top of steep hills—up which we should naturally be rushing at our best speed—with an absolutely unprotected drop of thousands of feet, over which more than one unwarned motorist had shot to his doom! Very cheerful news, wasn't it? Just the sort of place to find oneself on a dark and stormy night! But we should be tackling it in the daylight, though we certainly didn't disdain the offer of pilotage.

While the matter of the tyre was being attended to, my husband returned to the Savoy, where in the meantime I had finished our packing, and we went for a stroll in the streets of Madrid. It struck me as being a very beautiful city, though not so unmistakably Spanish as one would expect the capital to be. We saw the strange monastery-palace known as El Escorial, built at the

bidding of Philip II, whose father, Charles V, deserted his throne for the gown of a monk. The immense structure appeared very imposing, standing high above its surroundings on the slopes of the Guadarrama to the north of the city. I was told also that the Escorial is dedicated to St. Lawrence, and is consequently designed in the form of the gridiron upon which that saint suffered martyrdom. But time was passing, and the hour of our appointment with " Señor Dunlop " approached. We had just time to visit the Museo del Prado and glance at the famous works of Murillo, Goya—and last, but not least, Velasquez, whose " Crucifixion " is one of the most valued treasures of Madrid. But such wonderful works of art are worthy of hours, if not days, of study; it was rather ridiculous to attempt to see them all in a few minutes, and the less I say about my impressions of these old Spanish masters the better!

And so to work again. I was rather curious to see the alleged " death-traps," because we had encountered so much of this sort of thing, and had passed unscathed in spite of having received no warnings, that I doubted if Spain had anything worse in store. Before leaving Madrid we felt it safe, if we took things steadily, to reckon definitely upon getting through to Montlhèry by the time for which the track was booked for us, and we wired to Mr. Beare in London the day on which we should be able to meet him in Orleans. Having rolled the car out of its bag—a bothersome process that we disliked the more each time it was repeated—we drove round to Dunlop's, where the managing director and a friend were awaiting us in a speedy-looking Panhard. The looks of the car did not belie its performance, and its occupants were evidently speed merchants. In fact, I very soon found that to keep up with them meant straining our poor little A.C. more than was wise, apart from the fact that continuously driving in the dust of

the larger car would have been most unpleasant. So, difficult to suppress as was the temptation to show off the powers of our car—and with its capability of putting up a comfortable 112 kilometres an hour, I dare say I could have led them rather a dance!—I kept going at a steady pace, and let the Panhard vanish into the distance. The road, also, was not too good, and as the tyres had been pumped a lot harder than was comfortable, with a consequent shattering effect on the uneven surface, a moderate speed was advisable. The others soon saw that we were not out for that kind of fun, and curbed their own exuberance so that I was easily able to keep the Panhard just in sight.

After some sixty kilometres of this, we struck the beginning of our climb over the Sierra de la Guadarrama, although after passing through El Molar—practically the only place of any size on this deserted road—it had become more picturesque and undulating. Before reaching the actual Guadarrama range, however, we had to cross the Col de la Miel, at an altitude of some 3,500 feet—Madrid itself, by the way, is perched on a plain more than 2,000 feet above the sea, but we had long since tumbled down to lower levels. Suddenly, at the top of a fairly steep ascent towards what we knew must be the summit of the pass, we noticed that the Panhard had stopped for us to catch it up, and as we drew up to them the two occupants waved urgently to us to go cautiously. Signifying our understanding, we let them go on, and saw for ourselves how necessary the warning was. Not very many yards over the top, and quite invisible until we were actually on it, was one of the worst corners I have ever seen, with a gorge at the side with a sheer drop of certainly 1,500 feet. There was nothing, not even a pile of rough stones, in the way of protection, and on a misty night, or if one's head-lamps were not up to scratch, I could not see how anyone could

hope to keep on the road. Even in daylight the place gave me an eerie feeling, and I was not at all sorry to have got beyond it.

Over the next twenty kilometres or so the road became ever more mountainous, and though the gradient was never very steep, the ascent was continuous, until I began to get that curious sensation of opening and shutting in the ears which always attacks me at great heights. In the meantime, the previous performance had been repeated, the Panhard pulling up to warn us of the second of the two death-traps. This time, however, they allowed us to go by, waving us a cheery farewell, as we disappeared round the dangerous corner—not quite so bad as the first, perhaps, but sufficiently fearsome!

Snow soon began to appear in scattered patches, and as we went on up the slopes of the sierra it gradually became continuous and all-enshrouding. In the neighbourhood of Somosierra, a mountain village very near the summit, a road just wide enough for comfortable progress had been ploughed through the snow, and up this narrow path we climbed over the final stage of the Col de Somosierra to the top, well over 5,000 feet in the air. We stopped to take a few photographs of this desolate region, and after carrying on again for about half a mile and finding that the cold and rarified air had made us hungry, suddenly remembered that for once we had brought some sandwiches with us on the car. It was lucky we had taken the precaution on this day, for from now onwards for more than sixty kilometres there would be nothing but mountain villages where it was unlikely that we should be able to obtain the kind of food we should want. But our pangs were soon quelled, especially as it was too cold to picnic in the snow, and we ate as we sat, in the car. The road on the descent was much more treacherous than on the southern side of the mountains, as it was thawing fast.

Photo by Hon. V. A. Bruce

SNOW ON THE COL DE SOMOSIERRA IN THE SIERRA DE LA GUADARRAMA

Eventually we ran into Aranda de Duero, the first town of any size—and not very large at that!—that we had seen for many hours, and thereafter my recollection of the road is that we were constantly crossing rivers. Without referring to the map I cannot recall the exact number of bridges which required extreme care, but all the streams of the Guadarrama seemed to come tumbling across our path. Towns and villages became more frequent as we approached the lower levels, though the drop down was much less than I had expected. The whole of this portion of the country, I discovered later, on going over our day's run on the map, lies high—over 2,000 feet—with sharp hills which take one up to 3,000 every now and again.

Burgos itself, the ancient capital of Castile and home of the Cid, was a welcome sight, as although the run had been far shorter—only about 150 miles—than most of our daily trips, we had started fairly late, and of course mountaineering is much more trying than straightforward travel on the flat. Before seeking for an hotel at which to get tea, we visited the post office to wire our friends, among whom excitement was beginning to run high, of our safe arrival so far; and then we saw the most pleasant sight that had greeted us for many a long day—the dear old, familiar A.A. hotel plaque! I believe there are a number of such " appointed " hotels in Spain, but this was the first that we had actually seen, and it really did make us feel that we were entering on the last stages of our long tour.

But it doesn't do to take things for granted, as it is always at the eleventh hour that troubles come, and I had an uneasy feeling that we were tempting the fates in making such definite announcements of our arrival. But the best cup of tea that I had had for many days dispelled such gloomy feelings, and we were soon on the road again, aiming for Vitoria. The run onwards was

without untoward incident, though once, in the dark, we arrived at a cross road where there was, as usual, no signpost. It was impossible to do more than guess which was the right road, but fortunately another car came along and we were able to inquire from the driver. He indicated the right-hand road, and we carried on for quite ten miles without coming upon any further confirmation of the fact that we were going right for Vitoria. At the same time the road was becoming more and more hilly, and we were just beginning to get worried when ahead of us in the sky we saw the reflections of the bright lights of a large town, which could only be that for which we were aiming.

Vitoria proved to be a nice, clean town, and finding that at the hotel they spoke excellent French, it felt almost like coming home—certainly I became so fluent that French seemed like my own tongue. Everything went well on this night, as first of all we were able to lock the car up safely, thus avoiding the tiresome business of the bag, and later had a most excellent dinner, in which asparagus done in the English fashion, with melted butter, tomato soup, spring chicken and several other dishes, including trifle (my favourite sweet) figure largely in my recollection.

On the following day we hoped to get to San Sebastian in time for lunch, as we had been told that the road was good all the way. Discounting this, from our previous experience of " good " Spanish roads, we were pleasantly surprised to find that for once the description was reasonably accurate, though from the outset it was winding and soon became very hilly, culminating in a mountain pass at Alto de Arlaban. The descent was still more serpentine. The country had now completely changed, and reminded me more of Central Wales than of anything else I have seen. But we were back in a land of hairpin corners, and—by this

time—badly deteriorated surface, so that I had little time to spare for gazing at the scenery. At one point, though exactly where I do not remember, we heard a shrill whistle. It didn't seem anything to do with us, and I was reluctant to stop, but my husband insisted—having seen the origin of the sound, I suppose. Anyway, it turned out to be a sentry, who demanded the payment of a toll of five *pesetas* for the use of the road.

The difficult part of the run did not really last very long, though it was quite severe in both gradient and twistiness for some thirty miles, but at last we ran down into a beautiful valley with a wide stream running through it, and struck an absolutely perfect tarmac road, upon which we ran along the coast of the Gulf of Gascony, in the Bay of Biscay, into San Sebastian. Here we lunched, according to programme, though not wishing to be too late on the road, and having still about 250 kilometres to do to get to Bergerac where we proposed to spend the night, we did not linger over the excellent meal. The coast road continued splendid and, of course, the scenery just what you would expect such scenery to be—though too urban for my liking. Frontier formalities were completed soon after leaving Irun, and we appreciated the fact that we had passed from one country and language to another by the change in the spelling of the frontier village's name from Behobia to Behobie. There followed a pleasant but somewhat hilly run of thirty odd kilometres through St. Jean de Luz to Bayonne, and much as we regretted leaving Biarritz away on our left, time would not permit of any divergence from schedule.

Continuing on through Tarnos, we passed near the banks of the Lac d'Irieu, from which point a wonderful view of the nearer peaks of the snow-clad Pyrenees, standing 10,000 feet and more, can be obtained. In the neighbourhood of Dax, which town our road skirted, we

came to glorious pine country, with miles and miles of noble fir trees—which, however, seemed to me a little sombre in the light of the waning afternoon. At Mont de Marsan we stopped for tea, completing the remaining 150 kilometres via Marmande to Bergerac largely in the dark. The road after Marmande was not so good as that upon which we had been congratulating ourselves all along; and we were not to finish the run without some excitement. It was about ten o'clock when suddenly there was a loud explosion from our silencer, and, having turned to the reserve petrol supply many miles before, we knew what it meant. We had run out of petrol. For the last hour and a half we had not seen a single car or, for that matter, anyone or anything at all on the road, so that the only hope was that we were as near Bergerac as our " speedo." told us we ought to be.

" Let her run as far as she will ! " my husband said. " Put her in neutral. Every yard we run is one we won't have to walk ! "

Seeing the force of the instruction, I let the car have her head. The road was slightly downhill, fortunately, so we ran freely on and on with scarcely decreasing speed until at last lights ahead told us that the worst now could not be very bad. But the road took an upward turn for the last half-kilometre, and it was touch and go whether the car would actually free-wheel into Bergerac or not. She came to a standstill eventually just past the first few houses of the town—within a dozen yards or so of that most acceptable institution, a petrol pump !

Here for the first time we stopped at an A.A. hotel —on the previous day at Burgos we had merely " tea'd " at one—and I cannot say how delightful it was to get back to plain and simple food after the oily and highly-seasoned stuff we had to eat in Spain.

CHAPTER TWENTY

In which we get out of trouble with our usual celerity; perform a most monotonous task on a motor-racing track, and return at last to London.

CHAPTER TWENTY

As in the case of most old English country hotels, the garage was attached to the main building, so that little time was wasted in getting away in the morning on the proposed run to Orleans. The route lay through Perigueux, where we had to visit the post office and then retrace our tracks to find the turning for Limoges; but in spite of an auspicious start it was soon evident that this day was not to be a bright one in our records. For the car did not feel happy, and as time went on both my husband and myself became increasingly worried at the evidence of our ears and our senses as to the condition of the rear axle. On reaching the little town of Thiviers, some thirty-six kilometres beyond Perigueux, we decided to halt for an inspection, and on finding that the casing was abnormally hot, my husband unscrewed the back oil plug, to find out whether there was sufficient lubricant. There was no sign of any oil at all; but this was not the worst, for in the drain plug we were horrified to see a number of small nuts, spring washers, and a bent-up bolt! It was obvious that there was not the slightest use in attempting to go on, for although the car had not refused to run, it was not possible that it could go much farther. It was, in fact, the " eleventh hour trouble " which I have dreaded all my life; and the position was made worse by the nearness of the date when we were due in London. Apart from this, also, we had booked the Montlhèry track for a

definite three days for the speed trial which was to be a part of the official R.A.C. event that we had "let ourselves in for"; the time was now about midday on Saturday, and on the Monday morning a number of our friends would be waiting at the track to give us a cheery send-off.

Could the car be repaired, or a new rear axle obtained and fitted, in a maximum of forty-eight hours? That was the problem; and unless this could be done we should be unable to keep our engagements, which, to me, was doubly sad as we had been so fortunate hitherto in adhering rigidly to schedule at every point. No one likes to fail in any undertaking, and I felt the danger more keenly because I had hoped to do so much to popularize motor-car driving among women by the example of my own performance. And this looked like being the tragic end of that performance!

My husband soon came to the conclusion that although a repair could be effected by wiring for spare parts to the factory in England, this would most likely prove a longer job than the fitting of a complete new axle—which could, no doubt, be obtained just as easily and quickly from home as the small parts that were damaged, while the fitting could be done more expeditiously. So, to the post office once again, though on a more important errand than usual. We had much discussion as to the possibility of the axle reaching us in time, and so far as we could see the chance was a slender one. The one hope lay in our being able to catch Mr. Pitt, who, it will be remembered, was one of our passengers on the Monte Carlo Rally, and who proposed to be present for the speed test at Montlhèry, before he left home that very night. If we could catch him, we knew that he would willingly obtain the axle from the A.C. works and bring it through with him.

I ran the whole way up the long hill at the top

of which the post office in Thiviers was situated, wishing that it had been Limoges or Orleans at which the trouble had overtaken us, as from a larger town one could have got a trunk call through to England, and made sure of the very hasty service we required. Thiviers, however, was but an overgrown village, and I was not surprised to learn from the post office officials that a wire was not likely to be received within less than six hours from the time of despatch. I explained the position, and asked if there was anything to be done to expedite matters. There was, it appeared; by paying *trois fois* the normal cost of a wire, the telegram might get through more quickly! Needless to say, I would gladly have paid thirty-three times the amount for the chance, but even so it was a forlorn hope. At the very latest, the telegram must reach Mr. Pitt by four o'clock, in order that he could get the axle, and see to all the necessary customs and other formalities in time to catch the night boat. And even if he got the wire, was it possible for him to perform in a couple of hours a task that normally occupied the best part of a day? Well, it was no use worrying any further. I got the telegram off and returned to the garage, where my husband was still busy with the damaged axle, having found that the trouble lay in the worm wheel of the rear-axle drive. They say that "Even a worm will turn," but in this case, our "worm" had almost reached the point of refusing to do so!

"Just as I thought!" my husband said. "The spring washers lost their 'temper' through the heat when we ran out of oil in Africa. The bolts worked loose, and everything's chewed up!"

I reported progress at my end, but expressed my doubts of the possibility of the whole thing. My husband remarked that if the post office did their part, and Mr. Pitt got the wire, he was the man to save us

if anyone could. We had to leave it at that, but before returning to the hotel, which, incidentally, belonged to the manager of the garage, we arranged with the garage staff—who took the whole thing very sportingly—that they should work on the Sunday, and all night if necessary, if the axle arrived. If——!

Then began the worst time of all. Waiting, waiting, waiting! The hotel was dreadfully cold, and there was absolutely nothing to do to take our thoughts off the trouble. Somehow, by wrapping ourselves in rugs and endeavouring to play patience, the time passed, but we had almost reached a stage of absolute despair of receiving a reply to the telegram in time when, after ten o'clock that night, the maid-of-all-work came bustling in with the longed-for green envelope. Tearing it open, I was horrified to read:

"Do you want front or rear axle? Reply Dieppe boat.—PITT."

In my anxiety and hurry, I had merely mentioned "axle," without specifying which was wanted! I had visions of our energetic friend turning the A.C. works inside out, and marching out triumphantly with a front axle under one arm and a rear under the other!

As a matter of fact, that is very much what happened. Dashing off to Thames Ditton immediately he received the telegram, he rushed into the Service Depot and shouted, in effect:

"My kingdom for an axle—one of each, please!"

"Whatever for?" they asked him. "Someone's had a mighty funny smash."

He explained that the Bruces were in trouble, and the idiots (at least, I expect that's what he called us) had not said which axle they had "done in." So in about twenty minutes the pair of axles was put on a van and rushed up to Victoria to catch the boat train.

Eventually they were both put on to the boat, and when he received my explanatory wire, Mr. Pitt had the unwanted one taken off again, to the surprise of the captain, who must have thought that he was not quite all there!

At our end there was nothing to do but sleep, and eat, and wait. At about eleven o'clock next morning we received the reassuring news that Mr. Pitt and axle, all complete, had caught the boat, and we were at last able to hope again, though we should not have been so sure that he would catch the train arriving in Thiviers in the small hours of Sunday morning if we had known the snags that he would find in the path of a quick journey through Paris. We spent the time still wrapped in our rugs and persevered with patience—a very appropriate game, by the way. I suppose we felt the cold more on account of having come direct from the warmer climate of Africa, but it was that penetrating kind of damp cold that chills you through and through. In the afternoon we went across to the station to meet Mr. Beare, who had come on from Orleans in response to my wire, although he was as yet in ignorance as to the particular calamity that had hung us up. He had brought with him a goodly collection of cuttings from the *Daily Sketch* and other papers concerning our tour, and what with examining these and explaining the situation the time slipped by more quickly. But we minded nothing now, not even the French custom of making the same knife and fork serve for each one of about nine courses at dinner. The axle was on its way; the mechanics had promised to make a start at six o'clock in the morning, so everything was bright and happy.

Next morning, in three hours and twenty-six minutes from the time of starting the fitting of the new axle, the car was ready for the road again, and with very little

delay we set off on the long run to Montlhèry, with the option of stopping overnight at Orleans if the hour was getting late when we arrived in that city. Actually, we exercised that option, preferring to cover the last hundred miles when we were fresh on the following morning, rather than carry on late into the night—and, so far as I was concerned, for the sake of stopping in a town where I was sure of being able to get a hot bath, instead of making for a place where this luxury was at least doubtful.

We made an early start next day and reached the track after a pleasant but uneventful run, and after filling up with petrol and complying with the necessary formalities we went straight off the road on to the track. As we had lost several hours of the first of the three days that the speed test was to last, we altered the original plan of completing 400 miles each on the first and second days and the remaining 200 on the third day; and especially in view of the fact that I had already driven 100 miles that day on the road, we made the programme 300-400-300.

I soon had the little car humming round at a steady 50 miles an hour, although at no time was it altogether easy in the high winds that prevailed during the whole of the test, to keep absolutely dead on the mark. The difference up wind and down wind was enormous, and as soon as I thought I had got the necessary throttle opening nicely planned out, either the wind would drop or increasing gustiness would upset all my calculations! As a mild form of amusement and a break in the monotony of circling round and round the small track, I tried to set the hand throttle so that what the car gained when running with the wind would be lost when travelling against it, thus making the average speed for each lap correct, but this proved practically impossible in the changeable conditions. Perhaps it was as well,

Photo by courtesy of the "Daily Sketch"

DURING THE STORM AT MONTLHÈRY RACE TRACK

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because if I had had nothing to do but steer, I expect sleepiness would have been a worse trouble than it was.

After the first 100 miles—that is, two hours—on the Monday we broke off for a rather late lunch. Another similar distance was covered before tea, by which time dusk was falling, so that the remaining 100 had to be covered in the dark. This was a most unpleasant task, as there was then a raging tempest, and the wind was so high that time after time it blew the car bodily several feet out of its course. The danger lay in the fact that at the speed of 50 miles an hour it was impossible to drive with any sort of comfort anywhere but at the extreme inner edge of the concrete. Bordering this at certain points were beds of stiff gluey clay, and to have run off the concrete into this border, even at 50 miles an hour, would have spelled inevitable disaster. Sheets of rain were falling continuously, and at times the rays of even our extra-powerful head-lamps could scarcely penetrate through the curtain of water, while the blackness of the wet track and the absence of the outstanding objects that one is used to on the road made driving a nightmare. If the windscreen wiper had not steadily performed its task, I most certainly couldn't have completed mine. But at last the final mile of the day's 300 (plus 100 on the road!) was finished, and I was free to put the car away and pack myself off to bed.

After the first hour or so on the second day, my task began to get very monotonous again, but the constant reception of congratulatory telegrams from friends at home helped to keep my spirits up. And once, as we approached the Montlhèry equivalent of the Brooklands paddock, we saw my husband and Mr. Pitt (the R.A.C. observer was, of course, on the car, and Mr. Beare had elected to share the monotony also) staggering under the weight of a large blackboard, on

which we could see they had chalked out some sort of a design. On getting nearer, this resolved itself into an excellent representation of a snail! I suppose 50 miles an hour on a heavily banked motor-race track does seem pretty slow to the onlooker. I would willingly have gone faster—only too willingly, since trying to get the utmost out of the car would have given me an interest in my task—but the point that we wished to establish was that in spite of the gruelling through which it had been, the engine was still capable of running for hour after hour at high speed, from the ordinary motoring point of view, and twenty hours at a steady 50 was a good enough test for any touring engine. So I swallowed the "insult"; but not without retaliating. In a note which we threw out on to the track (noticing with joy that the wind led them a dance before they could capture it) on the next circuit we advised them to swallow some snails! Very childish, no doubt, but any little thing was welcome to take our thoughts off the continuous merry-go-round. At the end of 150 miles we stopped for lunch, and I was not at all sorry for the break, as stormy conditions continued, with high wind, squalls of sleet and rain, and enormous banks of inky clouds with livid fringes that seemed to promise worse to come. The task of holding the car on the small margin between the clay-bordered inner edge of the track and the abrupt banking, up which it was impossible to go at our pace, was no easier, and I was rather dreading the 100 miles that again I should have to accomplish after dark. Tea punctuated the end of the second 150, and afterwards I felt stiff and done as we tackled the last two hours of the day's task. When at last we had finished, my husband was waiting with a glass of steaming Ovaltine and milk, a beverage which I had found so refreshing that I had begun to demand it on any and every occasion —to such an extent, in fact, that I had earned the nick-

Photo by courtesy of the "Daily Sketch"

AN INTERLUDE IN THE THOUSAND MILES' SPEED TEST

name of the " Ovaltine Baby! " But I can stand a lot of chaff.

" Never mind. See what it has done for me! " I told them when they laughed at my preference.

" I think it would have ' done for ' me! " Mr. Pitt retorted.

As the last stage of the final 100 miles drew near on the next day, I began to get " that eleventh hour feeling " again. It did not seem possible that an ordinary touring engine, which had been through so much, and had not been specially prepared in any way at the outset of the tour, or even tuned up before the start of the speed test, could withstand the long-continued strain. But it did; and spectators told me afterwards that the note of the exhaust as we passed the paddock every few minutes was most amazingly regular and healthy, and that the engine did not miss a single beat.

But at last it was finished, and, having covered 1,000½ miles at a steady average of 50 miles an hour, I pulled in for the last time, to find a knot of friends awaiting me, with a lovely bouquet of carnations as a little " prize for a good girl." Expecting nothing of the sort, I was very much touched by this gift. It's nice to feel that your friends are really fond of you.

It was intended that at the conclusion we should drive on to Paris, some 20 kilometres away, and amuse ourselves on this last evening in France. But the strain had made me distinctly nervy, and I dreaded that drive into and through Paris in the dark, especially as a dreary drizzle was then falling. I felt absolutely convinced that if we attempted it something bad was bound to happen—we should be rammed by a taxi or something, which would prevent our turning up at the Hôtel Cecil, London, at midday the following day in fulfilment of our promises. And so, after the luggage

was actually strapped on the car, we altered our minds and had it taken indoors again, and spent the last night at the Chateau Hotel.

I had quite got over my creepy feelings when we started off for the run to Boulogne in the morning, and had lost all the fear of Paris which my overtired state of the night before had conjured up. And when we got to " la Ville Lumiere " a most extraordinary change seemed to have come over that city. Where on other visits I have rather enjoyed driving there because of the greater speed of the traffic, and the fact that one can indulge in tactics that are not permissible in London, this time even the taxicabs behaved most decorously. Even to English eyes the average speed of the traffic was noticeably slow. And to anyone who has not visited Paris for some time, the increase in the number of one-way streets, and the mushroom growth of " *Sens unique* " notices, is amazing. Gyratory traffic control is in force at every open space at road crossings, and it is probably this feature that has in some way slowed down the general speed, while eliminating the worst of the congestion.

We stayed long enough to have a cup of chocolate—insipidly sweet, by the way—at the famous Café de la Paix, and then pushed on up the Rue Lafayette and out on the road to Chantilly. A fast run brought us to Boulogne at tea-time, and I was very glad to be able to sneak the necessary hour to have my neglected hair put in order for next day's public appearance in London. The much-prized shingle with which I had left home two months before had developed into a bob, and a very shaggy one at that!

The crossing that night was smooth, and almost before I had had time thoroughly to examine a page in the *Daily Sketch* of the pictures which my husband had taken at the Palais Jamaï in Fez (including—hush!—

one of myself in the harem in very modern pyjamas) we had run in to Folkestone Harbour. The final run up to London next day, during which it was necessary to keep strictly within the English speed limit, was wearisome in the extreme, and although nothing was likely to go wrong at that slow speed, my anxiety grew as the miles slipped under us. I wanted to drive into the Hôtel Cecil courtyard at exactly the hour I had stated—and, to cut a long story short, I succeeded. But a small *contretemps* occurred. On entering from the Strand, the long experience of driving on the right on the Continent momentarily got the better of me, and I commenced to drive round the circular court to the right—to the chagrin of the crowd of camera men and cinematographers who were waiting on the steps of the Banqueting Hall entrance on the left. Feeling very silly, I reversed back and began again. No sooner had the wheels come to rest than the car was engulfed in a sea of cheering friends, who insisted on shaking hands until I thought mine would come off! Flowers were showered on me from all sides; and when at last I emerged from the throng and entered the hotel I had to answer the questions of the interviewers up to the very moment when lunch was announced an hour later.

This was a very pleasant, friendly function; but at its conclusion I had to sit unmoved while Mr. S. F. Edge said all sorts of nice things about me! Such are the penalties of publicity; but I suppose in time one gets hardened to this sort of thing. "A feat performed by a little, fragile woman entirely without preparation, which an athlete would not be too certain of accomplishing after strenuous training . . ." That was the kind of thing; but although it was rather embarrassing to have such compliments paid in one's presence, I consoled myself with the thought that after all it was largely with the idea of showing that a woman is a perfectly capable

driver of a modern motor-car, even on a long tour, that I had undertaken the trip. But I dreaded having to make a speech in reply! Actually I think I merely remarked: "Mr. Edge, ladies and gentlemen, I can only say 'Thank you,'" and hurriedly sat down again, but I know I was jolly glad to get it over.

I had refused all offers to take the little A.C. over at the Cecil, since I did not feel my task was completed until I had actually handed the car to the Royal Automobile Club officials at the garage in St. James's, and insisted on "bagging" it in the Cecil courtyard. So when lunch was over, the car was taken out of its bag for the last time. I drove down the Strand, across (or, at least, round) Trafalgar Square, and along to the R.A.C. garage. There my own blue A.C. coupe was awaiting me, and it was with profound thankfulness that my husband and I felt we had at last brought the tour to a successful conclusion as we drove back home to Esher.

And it is with a colourable imitation of the same feeling that I realize that though "of making many books there is no end," this one approacheth completion!

APPENDIX ONE

Some general observations on foreign touring by motor-car.

APPENDIX ONE

If anyone who has an idea of touring in any of the countries which we visited can get a few hints or any sort of guidance from that which I have written, the task has been well worth while. I am a great advocate of foreign touring as quite the most pleasant use to which the motor-car can be put. "See your own country first," by all means, but the speed and capability of the modern car is such that this is not very long in the doing. Also, I think that experience abroad is valuable in helping one to appreciate the beauties of our England —not to mention Scotland and Wales! Our tour was a very strenuous one from the everyday motoring point of view, of course; but there is no reason at all why the possessor of a good car should not repeat our performance, not in eight weeks, but in the course of several annual visits. I do not advise that our itinerary should be followed exactly, even by those who have the time to spare to do the trip in a leisurely way, because the roads of Southern Italy, as well as the hotel accommodation, are so bad that not even the admittedly wonderful scenery can offer sufficient compensation. But there is nothing to prevent the car from being shipped to Tunis from Naples, thus avoiding the most undesirable part of Italy; or, for a shorter tour, if Africa is the principal attraction, you may ship direct from Southampton to Algiers for quite a moderate sum. From Algiers the best of the North African beauty spots and points of interest can be explored very conveniently,

with runs down into the Sahara such as I have described in foregoing pages, and trips along the glorious Algerian Riviera. There is practically no need to fear language difficulties, especially if a smattering of French is available to help you out; in fact, Spain, as I have said before, proved far more troublesome than Africa in this respect. Although I am told that the number of British tourists who visit Spain is rapidly increasing, I am afraid that our experiences on this trip, so far as the South is concerned, at any rate, do not justify me in recommending that part of the country from the motoring point of view. The scenery in most parts through which we passed is undoubtedly lovely, but we found few good roads except in the neighbourhood of San Sebastian. Add to this the fact that the natives live in a state of isolation from surrounding districts and towns that is worthy of the Russian *mujik* before the revolution, speaking and understanding only their own language—and an incomprehensible *patois* of that—and you will appreciate why I say that Spain is not an ideal motor touring country. On the other hand the roads are rapidly being put in order, and will soon be as good as those of France. The language difficulty, also, is easily got over if you care to take a little trouble in advance.

Of France and Northern Italy I need say but little, as they are almost hackneyed subjects. But of continental touring in general, I do say that the difficulties are very largely exaggerated by those who have not had personal experience. The necessity for driving on the right, instead of the left, for instance, involves no trouble at all, and after the first half-hour becomes instinctive. The only time that especial care is necessary is in the first few days, when, if one has been driving for some kilometres on an empty road and unexpectedly meets another vehicle, there is a tendency born of habit to scuttle over to the left-hand side of the road. Even this

soon passes, however; in fact, many people have told me that on returning to England they have experienced far more difficulty in remembering to keep to the left than they had in getting initially accustomed to the continental rule of the road.

Customs and frontier formalities, again, need not daunt the would-be tourist. When it is considered that we went into and out of twelve different countries in the course of our tour (England, Scotland, France, Monaco, Italy, Sicily(!), Tunisia, Algeria, French Morocco, Spanish Morocco, Spain and Portugal, although some of them did not involve any formalities), and that the only real trouble was due to our papers being wrongly made out for an altogether different country, it can be imagined that the ordinary tourist would have no difficulty at all.

And now, with the hope that what I have written may prove of some little entertainment as well as service, I feel that I can conscientiously bring my task to a finish —the more so as I have persuaded my husband to add a few words on the technicalities of our A.C. car for the information of those who like that sort of thing.

APPENDIX TWO

Notes concerning the car and its accessories, and their respective performances, by the Hon. Victor Bruce.

APPENDIX TWO

By the Hon. Victor Bruce

For those who are interested in the car in which my wife drove "9,000 Miles in Eight Weeks," I will give a few technical details. We chose for the trip an absolutely normal "S.F.E." six-cylinder A.C. chassis, but decided to have, instead of the ordinary saloon body, a specially light fabric saloon, which was made for us by the well-known firm of Gurney, Nutting.

The engine is a 15·9, the six cylinders having a bore and stroke of 69 mm. by 100 mm., which gives a cubic capacity of 1,991 c.c. Overhead valves and camshaft are driven by a silent chain from the rear end. For the cylinders, steel liners are used in an aluminium casting, and it is interesting to note that this engine is so light that it has been taken up by the Air Ministry for a variety of uses in connection with airships.

The back axle, which includes the gear box as well as the worm drive and differential gear, is also of aluminium. Four-wheel braking is fitted, the front brakes being of the Alford and Alder Rubery type. Springs are quarter elliptic all round, anchored at each end to avoid the wear and tear of shackles, as well as the necessity for greasing. The clutch is a single plate, of A.C. patent, with a Ferodo disc bearing against a steel plate.

Although a fan was fitted to the engine, the belt was

removed, and we had no occasion to use it throughout the tour. In fact, no water was put in the radiator until we had covered 1,000 miles from Monte Carlo, and not again until the mileage was 4,888; the quantity added on these occasions was less than a pint.

Oil replenishment—Wakefield's Castrol XL was used—was necessary only at 3,500 miles and 4,888 miles, and on the latter occasion I added to the quantity in the sump merely as a precautionary measure, in view of the high-speed test at Montlhèry.

The back axle trouble, I am afraid, was entirely due to an oversight on my part. Frankly, I forgot to examine the axle after 2,000 miles, and the low level of the oil caused overheating, which ultimately necessitated our stopping to inquire into the cause of the trouble. I could have replaced the worm and wheel only, as these were the parts most seriously damaged, but thought it better to have a home-fitted axle complete, rather than trust to local garage labour in the south-west of France.

The bad roads were responsible for considerable tyre trouble, but I hardly see how this could have been avoided, as the state of the Italian roads in particular is such that nothing but steel tyres could live very long without puncturing or wearing out. Dunlop tyres were used throughout.

Among the more important accessories, the electrical equipment, including the magneto, was of Lucas manufacture, and gave very satisfactory service. It may be noted that the engine was started with the electric starter 490 times, in less than $3\frac{1}{2}$ seconds each time. The sparking plugs were A.C. Sphinx, and showed " 100 per cent. efficiency." The Stromberg carburettor needed no attention throughout. On no occasion did we flood the float chamber before starting. " Scaco " pneumatic upholstery was fitted to the Gurney-Nutting body, and

except for a leaky valve necessitating the reinflation of one cushion, this also gave no trouble. No record of petrol consumption was taken officially, since we were forced to use any and every kind of motor spirit that came to hand. Unofficially, however, the consumption worked out at roughly 23 miles per gallon. Our average running speed, from Monte Carlo onwards to London, not including the 1,000 miles at Montlhèry, when a steady average of 50 was maintained, was just under 25 miles an hour. I think that on the average we were running for about twelve hours per day of a six-days week.

It is rather curious to note that the only country in which we did not experience rain was England, and we were consequently very grateful for the Smith wind-screen wiper, which proved invaluable.

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SCALE IN MILES
0
100
200
John O'Groats
Inverness
Blair Athol
Stirling
Glasgow
Carlisle
Selby
Doncaster
Newark
Biggleswade
LONDON
North
Sea
Atlantic
Ocean
Amiens
PARIS
Montlhéry
Orleans
Auxerre
Viérzon

Marmande
Mont de Marsan
San Sebastian
Vitoria
Burgos
Pyrenees
Aranda
Sierra de la Guadarrama
Madrid
Talavera
Badajoz
Merida
Almendralejo
Seville
Jerez
Gibraltar
Tangier
El Ksar El Kebir
Rabat
Casablanca
Meknes
Fez
Taza
Oudjda
Tlemcen
Oran
Relizane
Orleansville
Blidah
Algiers
Boghari
Djelfa
Lagouat
Bou Saâda
El Achir
Sétif
Constantine
Guelma
La Calle
Beja
Tunis
Tunisia
Algeria
Morocco
Ben Guerir
Marrakesh
Great Atlas
Portugal
Spain
Mediterranean Sea
Avignon
Fréjus
Monaco
Genoa
Pisa
Florence
Chiusi
Rome
Naples
Pompeii
Salerno
Lagonegro
Cosenza
Messina
Palermo
Italy